

Christmas, A Line In Time Between Yes And No Luke 2:1-10

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There has never been an event, in the history of man, that has so defined human history as the birth of Jesus. That solitary event has shaped the world like no other.

This month, in most countries around the world, literally billions of people will gather to celebrate, to various degrees, the symbolic birth of a child who was born to an unknown couple in an obscure village over 2000 years ago.

His birth shaped and molded the culture of countries that were unknown to the people of Bethlehem 2000 years ago.

The United States is what it is today because a baby was born in a stable two millennium ago.

Even most of those who deny the existence of the Jesus will, in some way, take time to commemorate his birth on December 25th, even if it's only by taking a day off from work and eating turkey.

Think about it. You don't see Atheists jumping up and down demanding not to have Christmas off.

Yet, they'll gladly accept the time and a half they'll be paid for working on the Christmas in which they don't believe.

When we use phrases like "*the prodigal son*," "*turn the other cheek*," and "*the blind leading the blind*," we're quoting the One Who was born that day two thousand years ago.

When we espouse values like "*Do unto others*" and speak of the "*Golden Rule*," we're sharing the teaching of the Christ Child.

Every time we write the date, even without adding the AD, Anno Domini, we're saying something happened this number of years since Jesus was born.

That line in time wasn't just drawn at any time, it was drawn at just the right time.

Galatians 4:4, *"But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law."*

There are all kinds of reasons why the time that Jesus was born was the right time.

God could've chosen any time for His Son to come to earth and for the church to be birthed, but He chose a specific spot on the timeline of history.

According to historians there was no better time for the church to flourish than the two hundred year juncture of history known as The Pax Romana, the Roman Peace.

New Testament Scholar and Historian, E. J. Goodspeed, noted: *"This was the pax Romana. The individual under Roman sway found himself in a position to conduct his business, provide for his family, send his letters, and make his journeys in security, thanks to the strong hand of Rome."*

The Roman Peace had spread across the known world, providing one of the few windows of opportunities for the land and sea to be traveled safely without the threat of warring factions.

For the first time, roadways connected points across the known world. But it went beyond simple transportation, it incorporated communication as well.

Instead of having to learn a multitude of languages and dialects it was only necessary to know one.

Greek was the common language, a reminder of Alexander's conquests, allowing the written word to be sent encouraging and correcting the growing churches in diverse cultures.

It was not a coincidence that God chose this point in time to interrupt history. It was no accident that Christianity came when it did. The birth of Christ didn't happen on a whim.

Last week we looked at the line that was created for Mary and Joseph. When they accepted the challenge that was given them regarding the birth of Jesus, their lives changed radically.

It was a choice; God wouldn't have forced them to say yes to what was being proposed. Some have questioned if perhaps there was another "Mary" in the wings in case the first one said "no."

But Mary didn't say no, instead, in complete trust and in spite of all the obstacles she would face, we read her words in Luke 1:38a, *"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled."*

It was almost as if someone had dragged a stick through the sand drawing a line that said this was then and this is now.

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In my message today, we discover humanity divided into two groups, and which still exist today. In fact, each one of us belongs to one of these two groups.

Don't you love it when something can be reduced to the very basics? There aren't a hundred choices from which we have to choose, not fifty, or even twenty. Just two.

The first group we become acquainted with is *“Those who said ‘No’ To Jesus.”* I suppose there’s an honor of sorts to be the first person to reject Christ. So, who is he?

The innkeeper is really the first villain in the story. I mean what type of person would turn away a pregnant woman who was, as the King James Version puts it, *“Great with Child?”* That’s the polite way of saying that Mary was as big as a house.

Now, we often think of the Inn as having a big no vacancy sign flashing in the window, but it wasn’t the case here. That isn’t what the scripture says.

Listen to Luke 2:6-7, *“While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.”*

Did you catch that? The bible doesn’t tell us that there was no lodging available, what it says is that there wasn’t any lodging available in the Inn for them. There’s a difference.

If we take this fact to its logical conclusion the assumption is that while there wasn’t lodging for them there was lodging for others.

Perhaps the innkeeper was keeping the room in case he received a better offer, maybe he knew that, as more and more people arrived in Bethlehem for the census, any vacant rooms would become a commodity.

Even the most modest of rooms become more expensive when there’s a special event in town. Perhaps the Innkeeper was just hedging his bets, it wasn’t a personal decision, just an economic one.

Understand, they were not asking to be given a room for nothing. Again, we often mix up tradition with actual facts.

We've been conditioned from years of Christmas specials and Christmas cards to perceive the family that Christ was born into was one of poverty, and that probably wasn't the case.

Joseph wasn't poor, he was a carpenter, a tradesman. He wouldn't have been wealthy, but he wouldn't have been considered destitute in that day and age.

I'm sure when Joseph gathered up Mary and headed for Bethlehem, he came prepared; they weren't looking for charity.

But perhaps greed on the innkeeper's part wasn't his motivation. Maybe he just didn't want their type there. Maybe he has something against people from Nazareth, *"Sorry we don't have room for you people."*

Were they *"You people?"* Apparently for some they were. Do you remember the story found in the first chapter of John's gospel when the Apostles were first gathering around Jesus?

John 1:45-46, *"Philip found Nathanael and told him, 'We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.' 'Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?' Nathanael asked."*

So, perhaps the innkeeper just didn't like people from Nazareth. But how did he know they were from Nazareth?

When Jesus was arrested, you might recall that Peter is warming himself outside of where Jesus was being questioned and he finds himself being accused of being one of Christ's followers. A charge he denied.

Matthew 26:73, *“After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, “Surely you are one of them; your accent gives you away.”*

Peter was from the same area as Joseph and Mary, and ultimately Jesus. We never think of Jesus having an accent. From the movies we assume that, if Jesus did have an accent, it was either British or American.

Or maybe the innkeeper just didn't want someone who was obviously about to go into labor in one of his rooms.

There's the entire *“plenty of hot water and clean sheets”* thing, the potential for a mess, the idea of uncleanness, not to mention the screaming that might disturb other guests, a woman in labor is nothing to laugh at.

We don't know why there was no room for them in the Inn, but we do know that the innkeeper wouldn't be the last person to reject Christ.

Today when Jesus is rejected it's just like at the Inn. It's not because there's no room in a person's life, instead there's no room for Christ in their life.

Yet, there's room for all kinds of things, career, family, habits, ambition and maybe even religion but not Jesus.

Sometimes it's because a person really doesn't want to pay the cost. Sometimes they're hoping a better offer will come along. Sometimes they're just playing a long shot that they can live like hell and still make it into heaven.

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Then there are others who don't simply say no and turn their back on Christ but are vehemently opposed to all He teaches and for all He stands.

On that first Christmas, that person was represented by King Herod. Herod wasn't really a King but a puppet Governor whom the Romans let rule over a small portion of Palestine of which Bethlehem was a part.

Now, Herod was an insanely suspicious individual, with the emphasis on insane. He was suspicious of everyone, especially those he thought were a threat to his rule.

History tells us that he had his wife, mother-in-law, and two sons murdered because he thought they were trying to overthrow him, and maybe they were.

Caesar himself said, *"It is safer to be Herod's pig than his son."* Which was a lot more poetic in the Greek where the word for Pig was *Hus* and Son was *Huios*.

So, when Herod heard about the birth of the one who would be the Messiah, he asked the Magi to let him know where he could find the child so he could go and worship him, too.

Instead, after being warned in a dream, the Magi skipped Jerusalem on the way home, and the horror of the Christmas story is revealed in Matthew 2.

Matthew 2:16, *"When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Herod was furious when he realized that the wise men had outwitted him."*

Herod sent soldiers to kill all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, based on the wise men's report of the star's first appearance.

Some people wonder why genocide like this wouldn't be mentioned in history. Well, at that time Bethlehem probably had a population of no more than 2000.

So, we're probably talking about the death of 25 to 30 children tops. In a time when murder and unrighteousness was so widespread, the only people who would've been outraged at this tragedy would've been the families.

What we must remember is that there are those who aren't just content to just say "no" to Jesus but are evangelistic in their desire that nobody else say "yes."

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So, along with those who said "No" to Jesus there were also those who said "Yes."

When we read the Christmas story, we often focus on the fact that there was no room in the Inn, however there was room in the stable, and the stable belonged to somebody.

Somebody allowed Mary and Joseph to move in, perhaps just for the night, maybe longer. We don't know how long they stayed, long enough for Jesus to be born, and long enough for the shepherds to visit.

But apparently, they moved out before the Magi got there because Matthew tells us in his account that the Magi visited the child in a house.

Now, the offer of the stable would've been commendable if that was all they had, if whoever owned it said, *"I don't have room anywhere else but there is the stable,"* and they went out, cleaned it up, and made Mary and Joseph comfortable.

But it would've been a different kettle of fish if they had something better and all they offered was the stable. That would've been a completely different story and it would've had to do with motives.

Christ explains the same principle in a story found in the Gospel of Mark, perhaps you are familiar with it. Jesus is standing at the back of the temple next to the offering box and watches as a widow drops in two small coins.

Mark 12:43-44, *"Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."*

It's the same in our lives. The same gift can be given and for one person it is a sacrifice and for another it is just a bauble.

Regardless of why Jesus and His family ended up in the stable it did serve a couple of purposes. Remember Romans 8:28, *"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."*

Remember, the first people invited to come to Jesus were the shepherds.

We have to assume that they would've felt more comfortable and more welcome coming to a stable than coming into an Inn or a private home.

Not only that, but how inconsiderate would it have been for God to have brought a bunch of shepherds into someone's house with all of the mess and inconvenience that would've involved.

The shepherds were an important part of the Christmas story, so God made it easy for them to take part.

I think the story of that first Christmas is about the fact how Jesus is accessible to all people. There's something about His humble birth that says, "*He's there for all of us.*"

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Conclusion

Remember Marie Antoinette's comment, when she was told that the peasants were upset because they had no bread, "*If they have no bread then let them eat cake.*"

Actually, if you go a little deeper you discover that when that comment was first reported Marie Antoinette was only 10 years old and living in Austria.

While we don't know for sure who actually said it, historians feel that it was probably Maria Therese of Spain the wife of King Louise XIV of France.

That was free, just another one of those educational services that Grace Fellowship provides.

So, Christ began His life not at the top of the economic and social ladder but at the bottom and it wasn't just shepherds who came to worship Jesus that first Christmas, Magi showed up as well.

Matthew 2:1-11, records the story of these wise men. We really don't know much about them, but we do know that their belief cost them something.

We don't know from where they came, how long they'd been travelling, how many there were, or where they went afterwards. They glide into the story, present their gifts and then just as quietly they disappear.

If we listen to tradition, we can learn all about them. Their numbers were three, they were kings, and tradition even knows their names, their ages and what they looked like.

If we choose to pay the fee, we could even see their bones enshrined behind the high altar in the Cologne Cathedral in Cologne, Germany, but these are just traditions.

However little we know of the wise men, we do know that they came from a great distance bearing gifts of love.

They brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh, but greater than any of those gifts was the fact that they brought themselves.

It's interesting to note, and perhaps to ponder on, that Christ began His life born in a stable that belonged to someone else and ended his life buried in a tomb that belonged to someone else.

William Barclay wrote, *"That there was no room in the Inn was symbolic of what was to happen to Jesus. The only place where there was room for Him was on a cross. He sought an entry to the overcrowded hearts of men; He could not find it; and still His search--and His rejection--go on."*

So, this Christmas the question is the same as it was on that first Christmas morning over 2000 years ago: Will you make room for Jesus? Will your answer be “Yes” or “No”? Where will you stand in relation to that line that was drawn 2000 years ago?