

GOD KNOWS WHAT HE'S ABOUT

God Sends His Son

Luke 2:1–7; 2 Corinthians 9:15

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

The Christmas story details God's inexpressible, infinite, awesome Son, sealed in perfection from His conception to His birth, wrapped in love, and provided by God's grace as a gift to each one of us. From a past of pristine perfection and spotless purity in which Jesus existed throughout eternity past, He arrived on this planet—birthed in an animal enclosure with sheep grazing nearby . . . an enclosure that reeked with the odor of manure and urine . . . and the earthly stench of sin.

Many of us know this incredible story better than we know the lines from Clement Moore's *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*.

Have you ever wondered why God has us return every year to hear this familiar story? Because He wants us to know how much He loves us.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

The nativity has certainly been commodified, reproduced, reinterpreted, distributed, depicted, recited, and adapted in every form of media imaginable. One doesn't have to be a Christian to recognize the manger scene: the animals, the tiny baby flanked by His mother and stepfather.

But that overfamiliarity can breed indifference or inaccuracy. (For example, how many nativity scenes include the "three" wise men—when the wise men were nowhere near Bethlehem at the time of Jesus' birth?) It's so important to revisit this familiar passage of Scripture with fresh eyes.



Observation: Entering the Scenes

Imagining Bethlehem

One overlooked tool to become excellent observers of the Bible is *curiosity*. Keen observers should always prepare to see something new in each verse. A lifetime of Scripture study will not exhaust its insights, even for the most astute student

Quotable

*Every Christmas,
God whispers to
you who are not
yet His: "I want
to adopt you into
My family."*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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or tenured scholar. For those who have been exposed to the Bible throughout childhood or for decades during adulthood, the text can sadly seem stale and predictable.

One way to prevent such a skewed view is by embracing an attitude of curiosity when we approach Scripture. This involves recognizing that the Bible still has much to teach us—that it is filled with valuable wisdom for our everyday lives.

Let's exercise our imagination and curiosity as we observe Luke 2:1–7.

Online, or in the back of your study Bible, locate a map of Israel at the time of Jesus' birth. With your finger or cursor, trace the path from Nazareth to Bethlehem.

Approximately how many miles was the journey?

Imagine yourself traveling that route partially on foot or riding a donkey. Would it be a walk in the park or arduous?

Put yourself in Mary's sandals: she's almost due to have her baby. How does this help you observe Luke 2:6–7?

List the sights, smells, and sounds of the manger scene.



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Interpretation: Understanding the Meaning

Chuck Swindoll says in his message, “Things we can quote often have a story behind them we’ve not researched or known before.” Chuck then proceeds to masterfully flesh out the historical context of the first seven verses of Luke 2. Placing Caesar Augustus within a historical framework helps set the stage for the arrival of the baby Messiah. Isn’t it amazing how things as bureaucratic and mundane as taxation and census were laid as pathways for the arrival of Jesus? The story of Augustus also serves as a potent contrast between the kingdom of humanity (war, conquering, opulence, dominance) and the kingdom of God (peace, humility, befriending the marginalized and poor).

Let’s utilize some tools of interpretation to better understand Luke 2:1–7. Remember: Bible study takes *time*.

In light of the observations that you drew above, how would you describe Mary’s character? What about Joseph’s character?

Chuck mentions that “because [Mary] was pregnant out of wedlock and it was obvious shortly after the ceremony that she was very much pregnant, they were shunned by the people of their community.” Is it possible that the census trip provided a reprieve from prying eyes and wagging tongues?

Is there an instance in your life where a circumstance that initially seemed like a hardship ended up being a precious gift? Describe it here.



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The Hypostatic Union: Theology and the Virgin Birth of Christ

One of the most essential aspects of Christ's nature is the hypostatic union—that Jesus is both fully man and fully God. Chuck takes time to emphasize the uniqueness of Jesus as both the second person of the Trinity and human son of Mary because it's a concept essential to our faith. He lays out four "options" of Jesus' first coming and explains why only one could have taken place:

Option 1: Jesus is conceived by a human father and mother.

Pro: Jesus is fully human.

Con: Jesus inherits a human sin nature and is not fully God.

Option 2: Jesus is deposited on Mary's doorstep.

Pro: Jesus retains His godly personhood and sinlessness.

Con: Jesus would not truly be human.

Option 3: Jesus' spirit possesses a person who already exists.

Pro: Jesus can conduct His earthly ministry.

Con: Jesus is not truly corporeal; He's using someone else's body.

Option 4: Jesus is conceived in a human virgin, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Pros: He is fully human, doesn't inherit humanity's sin nature, and has a body. He experiences the highs and lows of being human and conducts Himself without sin.



Searching the Scriptures Tips

Just as we need tools in the kitchen to help us cook our meals, we need Bible study tools to help us feed ourselves God's Word. The tools we recommend for studying Scripture are a Bible dictionary, such as *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, and a commentary, such as *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*. Versions of the Bible are available at BibleGateway.com, and an excellent online Bible commentary by Thomas L. Constable is at lumina.bible.org.



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Application: Adoption into God's Family

There's one takeaway in Chuck's message: Christmas reminds us that *God sent His Son into the world to reconcile people to Himself. He wants you in His family.*

If you do not yet know Jesus, *find out* how to have a relationship with God.

If you already know Jesus, take time now to write down in your own words a description of what the indescribable gift of Jesus means for your life.



A FINAL PRAYER

Thanks be to You, God, for the indescribable gift of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Thank You for adopting me into Your family. Amen.



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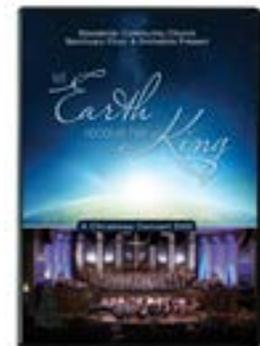
Tools for Digging Deeper



God Knows What He's About
by Charles R. Swindoll
CD series



A Promise Kept
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by Stonebriar Community Church Choir
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For the 2017–2018 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Sharifa Stevens in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Searching the Scriptures Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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