

Why I want to read and understand and preach the Nativity stories

By Bob Young

As a preacher, I believe the ideal time to present Bible truths is when people are focused on a particular Bible message anyway. That explains why I share the Bible stories of renewal, revival and starting over at the beginning of the year. That is why I preach about marriages in mid-February (with no intention to give credence to Saint Valentine). I make certain the gospel story is front and center in March or April. I share what the Bible says about mothers in May. I share what the Bible says about fathers in June. I usually throw in a good “memorial” story or passage near the end of May and a good liberation story or passage (the Exodus serves well!) in early July. Throughout the year, wonderful opportunities cross the calendar for sharing what the Bible says about material goods (April 15), young people (graduation and summer camp), education (August), work (early September), and gratitude (late November). In planning my preaching calendar in this way, I am not trying to call the church to celebrate either secular or religious holidays. I am only trying to use Scripture to focus people’s attention on what they are thinking about anyway.

In the same way, I do not consider the Nativity stories optional reading. I do not think they are to be rejected or ignored. I do not buy in to preaching this part of Scripture eleven months of the year, but totally avoiding it in December. In fact, the Nativity stories are more important than many people realize. I recognize the improbability of December 25 as the exact birth date of Jesus. I recognize that a host of religious (and secular) traditions have grown up around the holiday. I also recognize the importance of the early chapters of the Gospels as part of God’s revelation. I realize that despite its history and misunderstandings, “Merry Christmas” is connected to Christ. For me, that makes it better than religious greetings such as Happy Hanukah, Joyous Kwanza, and Blessed Ramadan. It also makes it better than Happy Holidays which is for some a politically correct way to deny God’s existence. I rather like the idea of making clear that for me God is an important part of family celebrations, generosity, and friendships.

I share some things I learn from the Nativity stories, things that would be hard to grasp apart from this part of the Bible. Some things would be virtually unknowable. Others could be discerned only with careful in-depth study. In the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John, the stories of Jesus’ coming to earth are an essential part of the theology of each book. Here is a short list of some of the reasons I want to read, know, understand, and preach the Nativity stories.

I preach the Nativity stories so people....

- Will understand the certainty and the importance of the fact that Jesus came to earth as a descendant in the line of David.
- Will know assuredly that Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, and will understand the importance of numerous Old Testament prophecies about Jesus.
- Will understand that God was in control of the details of Jesus’ birth.
- Will appreciate the identity of Jesus as both divine Son of God and human being—Savior, God with us, and Anointed One all combined in one person. In Jesus’ identity I begin to grasp the humanity of God in the flesh and am impressed by the frailty of God in the flesh.
- Will wrestle with the pre-existence of the One who became flesh.
- Will reflect on the significance of the “tabernacling God” who lived among us.
- Will try to grasp the possibility of a Royal Servant, or a Servant Lord, or a Fleshly Logos.

The list is incomplete, but there you have seven Bible truths that would be either unknown, or more difficult to prove and grasp, without the Nativity narratives.

I say to you again, Merry Christmas to all—brothers and sisters in Christ, neighbors, friends and family. May you in this season make room in your hearts, lives, and families for the One who is the Preexistent God, the Babe in the manger, and the Savior of the world.