

ADVENT 2021

This Advent season, we will be preparing our hearts to respond rightly to Jesus as He reveals Himself to us on His own terms. We will look mainly at the reactions of a few key people in the first advent of Jesus. God revealed to each of these people that Jesus had arrived, but they all found out in their own unique way. How is God meeting you? Are you prepared to meet Jesus on His terms? As we look at these reactions, we will hopefully have a deeper sense of connecting with Jesus in personal way.

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SIMEON AND ANNA

Nov 28, 2021 | Luke 2:25-38

The response of Simeon and Anna. Simeon makes the announcement that “thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.” Simeon and Anna were ready for Jesus. They, in relationship with the Spirit, understood the plan of God and how this new baby fit within the plan. The arrival of Jesus brought them peace and hope. What does his arrival expose in your heart?

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. 26 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. 27 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, 28 he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, 29 “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; 30 for my eyes have seen your salvation 31 that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.” 33 And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. 34 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 35 (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.” 36 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, 37 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. 38 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 2:25-38

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Dec 05, 2021 | Matthew 3:1-12

The word of Jesus' coming through a prophet: John the Baptist. He came to prepare the way for the arrival of Jesus, calling people to repent. When Jesus shows up, are you ready for his message of repentance? Are you processing the problem of sin or apathetic towards righteousness? Readiness for Jesus involves distaste for sin.

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." 3 For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'" 4 Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5 Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, 6 and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. 9 And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. 10 Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 11 "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.— Matthew 3:1-12

Study Questions

1. How does John prepare people for Jesus? Would this message create the same kind of following today? How do we prepare the way for Jesus today?
2. Our sin inhibits our growth in Christ and our day-to-day connection with him. What sin (either action, mindset, or strife) do you need to confess that is getting in the way of your overall devotion to Christ? (Remember: confession is the simple agreement with God that something is wrong. It can be something you've done or something done to you, but it needs to be a conversation where you agree with God about its "wrongness." This initial agreement paves the way for forgiveness, repentance and freedom.)

3. Why is John so harsh with the Pharisees and Sadducees?

4. From these verses, what do you see in John's heart that makes himself prepared for the arrival of Jesus (see also John 3:30)?

5. From these verses, why is Jesus better than John?

6. What's the closest thing to a locust that you have eaten?

MARY AND JOSEPH

Dec 12, 2021 | Luke 1:26-56

God meets with Mary and Joseph in different ways (dreams, angelic encounter) as they respond to this crazy news of pregnancy. Both respond in faith/obedience, ready for the Lord was going to do. Mary in particular was ready for the exaltation of the humble, and the downfall of the proud. Are you prepared for Jesus to talk with you about your pride?

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" 29 But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. 30 And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32 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, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." 34 And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" 35 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. 36 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. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God." 38 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. 39 In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, 40 and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41 And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, 42 and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! 43 And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. 45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

46 And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48 for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; 49 for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. 50 And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. 51 He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; 52 he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; 53 he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. 54 He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, 55 as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever." 56 And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home — Luke 1:26-56

Study Questions

1. God met with Mary by sending an angel to talk with her face to face. But he met with Joseph through a dream. Why is God using different ways to meet with them? How does he typically meet with you?
2. What do you see happening in Mary's heart from what she says in verse 38. How is she able to say this in the midst of the impossible situation she is now in?
3. Mary clearly has a great joy in light of all that's happened. As we look at her statements in verses 48-55, what specific things has the Lord done to bring her joy? Do you find joy from the work of God?
4. Mary glorifies God for three specific attributes: his might, his holiness, and his mercy. How does reflecting on God's attributes affect the way you worship?

HEROD

Dec 19, 2021 | Matthew 2:1-20

The response of Herod. God revealed his plan to Herod through the Magi's interpretation of the star. Herod was troubled, threatened and angry by Jesus' arrival. He was living his life for the pursuit of power and security, rather than salvation from God. His response to Jesus was one of violence and grappling for personal security. He dies in unresolved anger, fighting the undefeatable plan of God. Are you ready for Jesus to talk about the pursuits gripping your heart?

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, 2 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." 3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; 4 and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 5 They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: 6 "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." 7 Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. 8 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." 9 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. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 11 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. 12 And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

13 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." 14 And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt 15 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. 16 Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. 17 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: 18 "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more." 19 But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, 20 saying, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead." — Matthew 2:1-20

Study Questions

1. Matthew tells us that Herod was “troubled” and later on “furious.” What’s going on in his heart that would lead to him fighting and rejecting Jesus?
2. We can tend to view Herod as a really bad guy, but we all had times where we have a similar heart toward the Lord. Why do we resist his work in our lives? What’s often times going on in our hearts when we resist him?
3. Herod not only rejects Jesus, he tries to engage a chess match with God, using the Bible and other religious leaders to protect himself, hoping to secure his own selfish pursuits. It doesn’t work. How might we try to do the same thing as Herod, using religion to secure our own selfish pursuit?
4. If anyone should accept the work of God and his Messiah, it should be the King in Israel. Yet it is the very place we find rejection of Jesus. What do you think is the lesson for believers of the story of Herod?
5. Who “won” this contest? Herod or God? How did God “win”? What does this tell us about His character?