



## TEEN TREE OF LIFE

### Have You Ever Thought About The First Christmas?

December 26, 2021

Before you begin, ask yourself a very important question: Do you believe that Jesus Christ died on The Cross for all of your sins? If you answered yes, you will need to be sure that you are filled with The Holy Spirit. How do you do this? You name your sins to God The Father in His Son's Name. This is called Rebound. As a Christian, you must rebound any time you sin. This is taught in 1 JOH 1:9: *If we confess [name] our sins [directly to God], He [God] is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* Now, if you have never believed that Jesus Christ died on The Cross for all of your sins, all you have to do is say to yourself that you believe in Him and you are saved! The Bible verse which teaches us this is ACTS 16:31: *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved."*

Think about the best gift you ever received for Christmas. Maybe it was the new Xbox Series X and Playstation 5 or Apple AirPods. Maybe you got a leather jacket or if you're old enough to drive, maybe you got a car! Well, no matter what you consider to be your greatest gift, it doesn't hold a candle to the "Christmas Gift" that God gave us many years ago in a manger outside the city of Bethlehem. ***Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift! (2CO 9:15 New American Standard Bible)*** Look at this beautiful translation of **2CO 9:15** from the **New International Reader's Version: *Let us give thanks to God for his gift. It is so great that no one can tell how wonderful it really is!***

Of course, God's "Christmas gift" to you and the whole world is His Uniquely Born Son, Jesus Christ! When most people think about Christmas, they think about the gifts they give to others or the ones they receive, rather than the gift that Our Heavenly Father gave the world. No gift can equal His Gracious Gift because there isn't a more incredible thing than Salvation. Talk about the gift that keeps on giving!

But have you ever wondered how celebrating Christmas evolved into what it is today? The middle of winter had for a long time been a time of celebration around the world. Centuries before the arrival of the Birth of Jesus Christ, early Europeans celebrated light and birth in the darkest days of winter. Many peoples rejoiced during the winter solstice, when the worst of the winter was behind them, and they could look forward to longer days and extended hours of sunlight.

It wasn't until the 19th century that Americans began to embrace Christmas. Americans re-invented Christmas and made it into a family-centered day of peace and nostalgia. But what about the 1800s piqued American interest in the holiday? The early 19th century was a period of class conflict and turmoil. During this time, unemployment was high and gang rioting by the disenfranchised classes often occurred during the Christmas season. In 1828, the New York city council instituted the city's first police force in response to a Christmas riot. These catalyzed certain members of the upper classes to begin to change the way Christmas was celebrated in America.

In 1819, best-selling author Washington Irving wrote "The Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon" – a series of stories about the celebration of Christmas in an English manor house. The sketches feature a squire who invited the peasants into his home for the holiday. In contrast to the problems faced in American society, the two groups mingled effortlessly. In Irving's mind, Christmas should be a peaceful, warm-hearted holiday bringing groups together across lines of wealth or social status. Irving's fictitious celebrants enjoyed "ancient customs," including the crowning of a Lord of Misrule. Irving's book, however, was not based on any holiday celebration he had attended. In fact, many historians say that Irving's account actually "invented" tradition by implying that it described the true customs of the season.

Also, around this time, English author Charles Dickens created the classic holiday tale, "A Christmas Carol." The story's message – the importance of charity and good will towards all humankind – struck a powerful chord in the United States and England and showed members of Victorian society the benefits of celebrating the holiday. The family was also becoming more sensitive to the emotional needs of children during the early 1800s. Christmas provided families with a day when they could lavish attention and gifts on their children without appearing to "spoil" them.

As Americans began to embrace Christmas as a perfect family holiday, old customs were unearthed. People looked toward recent immigrants and Catholic and Episcopalian churches to see how the day should be celebrated. In the next 100 years, Americans built a Christmas tradition all their own that included pieces of many other customs, including decorating trees, sending holiday cards and gift-giving.

What goes on, on Christmas morning in your town? In honor of The Birth of Jesus Christ, the stores and businesses are closed. Except for the occasional restaurant getting ready for Christmas service, the town is quiet, the streets are deserted and even the streets and yards in the suburbs are desolate.

Have you ever wondered what was happening in Bethlehem the day God gave the world His Indescribable Gift? Have you ever stopped to think about what the first Christmas was like? We have learned what Isagogics is, with respect to learning Bible Doctrine. In order to fully understand the Word of God, the Bible must be interpreted within the framework of isagogics. Isagogics refers to the importance of looking at is the historical setting of what you're studying. History teaches us that Bethlehem was a successful town when Christ was born. So, we can be certain that the streets were filled with the noise and activity associated with a successful city. On the morning of that first Christmas, people were already out and about. Vendors were positioning themselves

on the corners of the most heavily traveled streets to sell their wares. Store owners were unlocking the doors to their shops in preparation for a busy day of sales. No one had any idea of what had taken place, so they all went about their business.

***She gave birth to her first baby. It was a boy. She wrapped him in large strips of cloth. Then she placed him in a manger. That's because there was no guest room where they could stay. (LUK 2:7 New International Reader's Version)*** The owner of the inn, where Mary and Joseph were turned away, had probably awakened earlier than most of the businessmen that morning. He had to have been super busy because his inn was full. While he ran around getting things ready for his guests, did the innkeeper think about the young pregnant woman on the donkey that he had turned away the night before? Probably not... It's unlikely anybody noticed Mary, the young woman who would give birth to Our Lord. They were too busy with their own agendas.

Imagine if, by chance, someone had wandered past the manger on the outskirts of Bethlehem that first Christmas morning. What a strange scene they would have encountered!! Off to one side of the manger was a group of shepherds. They sat silently on the ground, no doubt in amazement at what had happened the night before. Their night watch had been interrupted by an explosion of light from Heaven and a symphony of angels calling them to this very manger in Bethlehem. No wonder they were silent! Wouldn't you be speechless?

***"But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman" (GAL 4:4 New American Standard Bible)*** Next to the young mother and her baby sat Joseph, the exhausted father. If anyone was tired that morning, it was Joseph. And have you ever thought about what Mary might have been doing and thinking? Certainly, she must have kept looking into the face of her baby, like all new mothers do. But when she looked at Him, she not only saw her tiny baby boy – she saw her Lord and Savior! No doubt, she was reminded of the angel who had visited her which is written about in **LUK 1:30-33 (New International Reader's Version):** ***But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary. God is very pleased with you. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son. You must call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God. The Lord God will make him a king like his father David of long ago. The Son of the Most High God will rule forever over his people. They are from the family line of Jacob. That kingdom will never end."***

What a tremendous responsibility and what an incredible honor it must have been for her! But that tiny baby in that stable looked and acted like anything but a king. Like all babies, He was helpless and dependent on His mother. And The Son of Man, Our Savior, was born in a dirty sheep's pen!! The Lord Jesus Christ would say in **MAT 8:20 (New American Standard Bible):** ***"The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."*** It's difficult to imagine a humbler place, isn't it?

And meanwhile, back in the city of Bethlehem, life continued as usual. The merchants and the vendors, and the people hustling and bustling about, were oblivious to the fact that God had visited His people. **JOH 1:11 (New American Standard Bible)** states that ***"He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive***

**Him.**” Why didn't they receive Him? It wasn't out of maliciousness or evil. They were simply too busy – too caught up in their daily lives – just like so many people are today. The citizens of Bethlehem were too occupied with unimportant things to see what was truly important!

That very first Christmas, the people of Bethlehem were totally focused on their own lives. But those who lived in Heaven weren't! The Holy and Elect Angels were all waiting in anticipation. They were waiting to break out in praise, worship and adoration concerning The Birth of The Son of God – a Child Whose Birth meant that God Had Fulfilled His Word through His Christmas Gift to the world!! This gracious gift was a fulfillment of the prophecy: **“For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us.” (ISA 9:6 New American Standard Bible)**

What was the meaning of the first Christmas? The physical body of Christ was Divinely Prepared by God The Father and God The Holy Spirit. It was prepared as The Vehicle with which to bring God to mankind to be The Perfect Sacrifice for sin. It was a Body which was to be inhabited by The Second Person of The Trinity — Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. What was the first Christmas and all subsequent ones all about? The answer is summed up in **JOH 1:14 (New International Reader's Version): *The Word became a human being. He made his home with us. We have seen his glory. It is the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father. And the Word was full of grace and truth.*** What a Christmas gift!