

A Baby Will Come
Home for Christmas series
by Bill Aumack

Show of hands, how many of us are ready for Christmas? Like, five of us, maybe. Getting close, right? Getting close.

Have you ever felt like there was something you wanted to do, but there was just things holding you back? You just weren't getting it done, you know? And maybe it was something fun, you know, maybe you wanted to be an artist and learn to paint or pottery or learn to play an instrument or, you know, something fun that you just kind of wanted to do. Maybe it was actually something you wanted to do, like travel. But, you know, it takes money, time. Maybe you wanted to have kids, but the time was never right to have kids. Maybe you want to go back to school and finish your degree, or maybe you did finish your degree, but, you know, I've been doing this, and I'd really like to go back to school and get a degree in this other thing and do this for a while. And there's always something holding you back. There's that mortgage payment, there's kids to feed. There's things going on, and there's things that hold us back.

And at Christmas time, it seems like everybody wants to go home. But sometimes there's things that hold us back. There's broken relationships. I ain't going back there if my brother's showing up. Ain't no way. Or maybe somebody we love has passed away and Christmas won't be the same if we go home and they're not there. Maybe it's work. There's a big commitment at work. You can't get off work. You don't have the vacation time or the money. You know, airline tickets cost money. Sometimes you get all that stuff lined up. You've got the time off, you've got the money, you buy the tickets. And then the weather comes in and shuts everything down anyway. How many movies have we seen about people stuck in airports trying to get home? And so sometimes it just seems like everything is holding us back.

We're in our last week of Home for Christmas, and we've talking about going home on earth, restoring relationships, restoring family. And we've been

talking about how God made a way for us to be with him in the heavenly home and what that means. And last week, Pastor Chris did such an amazing job with the prodigal son. I don't think I've ever heard the prodigal son used at Christmas time before. So props, Pastor, but that was well done, and it just was perfect. So I'm not going to talk about that too much anymore. And today what we're going to do is we're going to look at, like, what Joseph does during this event and what lessons we can learn from that, because I think we're going to see that Joseph was already living the kind of life that Jesus would come along and profess for us to live before Jesus is even born. Okay, so we're going to be looking at that this morning.

And, you know, it really kind of seems like we're in the last days. You know, when Jesus was born, everybody was looking for the Messiah, the first coming of the Messiah, and now we're all looking for the second coming of the Messiah. Right. And so there's a lot of parallels there. And it certainly seems like we're in the last days right now. And obviously we don't know when Jesus will come, but it seems like it's closer than farther away.

And the song that we sang this morning, A Baby Will Come, I think, just has the words that just kind of really sum that up. It starts out with, the kings of the world have torn it apart, but we can take heart. A baby will come. I don't know about you, but it seems like the kings of the world have torn the place up. And I'm not just talking about governments, the businesses that are turning through our environment or turning through people just so they can make a dollar. Right? The world seems like it's a mess, but we can have hope because a baby will come. And it talks kind of future tense about that. And some of the people that are waiting, the hungry and meek, those who grieve, the broken, those who know pain. And then verse four says, and the angel appeared and said, do not fear, for peace is here. A baby has come. So we have a little different tense now. We've gone from future tense of baby will come to the baby has come. Verse 5. The advent of life. Let hope arise. We've our Savior in Christ. A baby has come because we've waited so long. And the humble will know they're valued and loved. And the last verse is almost the same as the first, because the kings of this world won't have the last word because that God is yours. For the baby has come, the singular baby, the one baby that would make a difference.

And Mary and Joseph lived in kind of a unique generation. Because obviously we live after the first coming and before the second coming. We're looking forward to the second coming. And before Mary and Joseph, everybody was looking for the first coming. But Mary and Joseph were part of that one generation that saw life before the first coming and after the first coming. And what a mind-blowing experience that must have been. It's hard for us to comprehend that because we look back with perfect 20/20 hindsight and go, oh, that's what that means. But when that stuff's all going on, it's not always that clear. Right. So they had a really unique view. So this morning we're going to look at that a little bit.

Let's open our Bibles. Let's go to Matthew, chapter one. Matthew, chapter 1, verse 18. Most of what we know about the births and stuff comes from Matthew and Luke. There's a few other spots, but most of it come from those two. And we're going to read 18 through 25. Give me an amen when you're there. All right.

This is how the birth of Jesus, the Messiah came about. His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph. But before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph, her husband, was faithful to the law and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace. He had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save the people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet. The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Emmanuel, which means God with us. When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son and he gave him the name Jesus.

All right, now there's actually precious little detail here. There's not a lot of detail here. And I believe that there's not a lot of detail here because Jesus's birth from for that time was a pretty standard birth for us. We think about being born at home or being born in the stable or the manger.

Phew. Cause we're used to going to the children's hospital and beeping machines and people running around in scrubs. And nobody did that. Everybody was born at home. And Jesus' birth wasn't that unusual. He was born at home just like everybody else. And so they don't give us a lot of details. But if we assume that Mary and Joseph were kind of ordinary people at the time, even though what happens to them is not ordinary. We can learn quite a bit. All right.

And it starts out with, Mary was pledged to Joseph. Some versions use the word betrothed. That's like a \$2 word, betrothed. We would use the word engaged. Okay? When you get engaged, you're saying, we're going to get married. The fact that it uses this pledged or betrothed is kind of an indication that it was probably an arranged marriage. It didn't have to be an arranged marriage. Not every marriage was arranged, but a lot of them were. And even if it wasn't, the family would be involved.

Now, the one difference between their weddings and ours is they kind of had three main things. You had the betrothing or the pledging. You had the ceremony, and you had to consummate the marriage. And those three things got you married. However, once that engagement happened, you were considered married.

That's different from us. Cause you get engaged and kind of announce, we're gonna get married. Everybody says, yay. When? And we all show up at the wedding. And at the very end of the wedding, the official or the pastor says, I now pronounce you man and wife. And then you are married. Anytime before that, you can break up, you can stop, you can call it off. I ain't marrying her. You got to be crazy, you know? And we don't like that. We feel bad when that happens, but there's no legal ramifications to that. In their case, there were. Once you had that betrothal, you were considered married, and he had to get a divorce from her. So it's weird, because on stage one, you're considered married, but you're not really married until you do all three steps. You know, it's government red tape. What are you gonna do about it? It's just the way it was, right? And so we see that even though they're only pledged to be married, Joseph is considering to divorce her, okay? Because that's what he would have had to have done.

Now, Mary was probably very young, 14, 15, maybe 16. And, you know, some of you that have daughters that are 14 years old, you want them to get married. No. But that's what they did. Many of us come from a culture where you have a quinceañera when you're 15. What does that announce? The young woman's available. She's grown up. She's available to get married now. And that's about the age Mary would have been. Joseph likely would have been a little bit older because the men were expected to go out and get their job. Get set up, start earning money so they could support a wife and a family. So Joseph might have been in his 20s, in some cases, maybe even early 30s, we don't know. But Mary was probably very young, and Joseph was a little bit older.

Now, with all that background, imagine that you're Mary and you know, you're feeling good, life's going pretty good. You're engaged to be married to a really good guy, you're getting along great, looking forward to the wedding. And then that angel shows up, throws a wrench into the whole thing, right? And while she's obedient, says, may it be as you say now she has to go tell Joseph. Can you imagine that? Can you imagine that? Now imagine you're Joseph. And Mary comes up and says, hey, you know, I haven't been with anybody, but I'm pregnant. God did it, right?

I heard a joke the other day about a woman who takes her daughter in to see the doctor. And they're complaining because she's hungry all the time. She's putting on weight, they don't know what's going on. And the doctor examines her and comes back and says, you're daughter's pregnant. And the mother says, she can't be. She's never been with a man. She can't be pregnant. And the daughter says, that's right. I've never been with a man. The doctor went over and starts staring out the window. After a couple minutes, the mom says, what are you doing? Well, the last time this happened, a star appeared and some wise men showed up. And I don't want to miss it this time.

Right? We know how that works. Imagine Joseph, he's going, "hey, I may not be the sharpest tool in the toolbox, but I know how this works, right? Why does she think I am stupid? I don't believe that for a minute." And so he's considering to divorce her.

Now, Joseph was a good man. If you look at verse 19:1, 19, he says, *because Joseph, her husband, was faithful to the law and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.*

Now, from the law's point of view, he could have done several things. One, she could have been stoned to death for infidelity. He could have made a public disgrace of her. But he decided to handle it quietly. He didn't want to bring disgrace on her. That says a lot about Joseph and his character. Of course, that night the angel comes to him, right? And verifies the story. And notice what Joseph does. Verse 24.

When Joseph woke up. He did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son and he gave him the name Jesus.

How long did it take Joseph to do what the angel had said? Immediately when he woke up? That's immediate obedience. Right. He didn't wait till the afternoon. I'll see her at suppertime. I have this image of Joseph pounding on Mary's door at 6am, right? Mary comes to the door, hair's a little disheveled, she's holding a cup of coffee. "Joseph, what are you doing here at six o' clock in the morning? You were pretty mad yesterday." Joseph said, "I had a dream." Mary kind of perks up a little bit. "Yeah?" "There was an angel." "An angel! Joseph, you believe me?" "Yeah, I believe you." Can you imagine the release, the shriek of joy, jumping around on the steps to the house, excited, as he believes. Now, it doesn't tell us exactly when he takes her home to be his wife, but I would imagine it was about as soon as he could do it was no waiting around, right?

All right, so let's go over to Luke, chapter two, Luke chapter two, Matthew, Mark, Luke 2. We're going to start right here at verse one. Luke 2. Give me an amen when you're there.

In those days, Caesar Augustus issued a decree that the census should be taken of the entire Roman world. This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was the governor of Syria. And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee

to Judea, to Bethlehem, to the town of David because he belonged to the house and line of David.

He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him. Wait a minute. And was expecting a child. 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.

Now, if you were paying attention, you should have like four questions, because that's how many I had. First of all, why are we going up to Bethlehem? You know, Israel's kind of a vertical country. Nazareth is north, Bethlehem is south. That's not up. But it says we go up to Bethlehem because Bethlehem was up 1500ft higher than Nazareth. And while that doesn't seem very big because we don't have to walk. When you're walking, you're concerned about going uphill the whole way. And it was uphill the whole way.

And it's about 70 miles straight line distance between the two. But you can't go straight line distance, Right. The roads never go straight and in particular Samaria is in the way. If you try to go straight line distance. And there is no way Joseph took his pregnant wife through Samaria. Remember, the Jews and the Samaritans don't get along real good. And you remember later Jesus and the disciples are denied housing or lodging in Samaria. There's no way Joseph is doing that to his wife. So they go around Samaria, which is where the main road goes today. And that's a 90 mile trip.

If you do that on Google Maps in your car, that's an hour and a half. If you're walking, the best you can do is 20 miles a day. And that's a forced march. Is 20 miles a day. 20 miles a day would take you how long to get there? Four and a half days, five days to get there. That's at a forced march. Now Mary's pregnant. You ever been around a pregnant woman? Is she comfortable, is she happy? Not all the time. Especially the later in the pregnancy. Right. Mary's feet, my feet are swelling up. They don't fit in these stupid sandals. Baby's pushing on my bladder. I gotta go to the bathroom every 3.2 minutes. Just uncomfortable. There is no way they could do 20 miles a day. So I don't know how long it took them to get there, but I bet you it was eight, nine, ten days, two weeks to get there.

Okay, this is an epic journey right now. The census would have been over a time period. It wasn't just like, you know, you gotta be there Tuesday to register and then everybody goes home. It was a time period, there were several months where you could go to register so that people had time to get there and get back. So if you've taken a week, two weeks to get there, do you go register and go, all right, well tomorrow we start home. Nuh. We can't even comprehend it taking two weeks to get somewhere because it doesn't take us two weeks to get anywhere on the planet. But if you went to Australia, that's about the farthest away you can get from here. I think it's some 20 some hours of flying. Okay, are you going to stay for like three days long weekend and then head back for another 20 hour flight? No, I'm not. I mean, I don't even want to fly to the east coast for a long weekend. Right. If I'm going to go out of that trouble and just that's only five hours away, I'm going to stay a while. So Mary and Joseph likely stayed a while. Okay.

And we also talk about Joseph and whether he had an animal or not. We don't know. The Bible doesn't say. But I started thinking about this. What's Joseph's profession? Carpenter. What does a carpenter need? Wood. Where does Joseph get wood? The forest. He's going to cut down a tree, drag the tree back to his shop, hew it in the logs. Can he do that by himself? Not unless he's Samson. Right. He's got an animal to help him. So I think that Joseph more than likely had an animal. We don't know for sure, but more than likely had an animal. Mary's probably riding on the animal, and we may think that sounds a whole lot better. I'm not sure, because if you've ever ridden on an animal, taking a step every single time, that's gonna get old after about five minutes. Right. The baby's jarring around inside you.

Where did they sleep? There might have been some inns that they were able to get some room in, but probably a lot of the times they slept out on the ground, they camped. Great. Now you're pregnant and sleeping on the ground. This just trip's getting better and better. Right. I want a new travel agent.

So, you know, this was. This was a hard, tough journey. Now we have this idea that. Well, let's.... Before we do that, let's look at verse five. What does verse five say? It said *he went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married him and expecting a child*. Now, wait a minute. Didn't Matthew just

say that he took her home to be his wife? So is she his wife or. Not exactly. He hadn't done all three steps yet. Now, I went down the rabbit hole on this one, and I spent way too much time on this. And I think I've read every article on the Internet about this. Probably not, but a lot of them. And here's what I know we don't know. That's what I know. I think that likely the simple answer is probably the best. And I think the simple answer is Luke is a doctor. And Luke is written with a certain amount of precision and preciseness in the words that are used and the things that are said. And I know some people think, well, Luke didn't even write it. He may not have written every word but he commissioned it because they called it the Book of Luke. If Gustavo had written it, we'd have called it the Book of Gustavo. Right. So Luke is involved. And I think his medical precision that he would have used is in this book a little bit. And from his point of view, they're not married because they haven't done all three steps. They've only done two of the three. Where Matthew a little more lenient. But the truth is, we don't know. But we do know that this is an extraordinary birth. And there was crazy circumstances and things were just different for this one.

And then the last thing is the story always ends with Mary and Joseph whipping into Bethlehem. Mary's on the back of some poor donkey doing her Lamaze breathing. Anybody here had to do Lamaze breathing when they had the birth, Right? Right. Getting ready for the birth. And they're racing from inn to inn to inn trying to find her a room. There's no room. And finally some kindly innkeeper says, you can sleep with the animals. And they go out and they have the baby in the barn all by themselves, them against the world. I don't believe that's what happened. And I don't think that's what the Bible says. Let's look at what the Bible says again. Right. Let's go to verse 6, Luke 2, verse 6. *While they were there.* Does that sound like the first night? No, it doesn't sound like the first night to me at all. Certainly doesn't sound like they came whipping into town with Mary going, hurry up. While they were there. Remember, it took them two weeks to get there. They're spending some time visiting family. Okay.

And while they were there, it came time for the baby to be born, verse 7. And she gave birth to the firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths, placed him in a manger because there was no guest room available for them.

How many of you have... Your Bible says guest room. How many of your Bibles say inn. Okay, this is the second rabbit hole I went down. So older translations seem to use the word inn all the newer translations seem to use the word guest room. And I went down the rabbit hole in that. Luke is written in Greek. And so we need to know a couple words.

There's one word, kataluma. **Kataluma. And this means the upper room for guests or entertaining.** This is the word that's used for Jesus in the Last Supper. And the disciples go, and they get an upper room. It's a kataluma. Houses in this time were often built on the ground Floor. The family lived, and there was a spot for the animals. And then there would be an upper room, sometimes kind of what we would call a loft. It may be part of the upstairs or a whole second story. That would be a room for entertaining or guest rooms. Okay. And so Luke knows what this word is. He uses it with Jesus in the upper room. The second word we need to know is pandoeon. Pandoeon. And so you get pando. That ch makes a sound like you're clearing your throat. I can't do it very well. I'm not Greek. Sorry. If you want to be Western about it, you could say pan-do-kay-on, but it's **pandoeon. This is a public inn.** This is the word that Luke uses in the story of the Good Samaritan. And he takes the injured man down to a public inn and leaves him there.

So Luke knows the difference between these two words and what they're meant for. What word does Luke use here? Kataluma. So this is a guest room or upper room. This is not a public inn. Why they translated that? I don't know. I guess. Again, guessing. It's a little bit like us, right? We have hotels, motels, inns. Do you know what the difference between all of them is? I looked it up once. There's some difference. But nobody gets in your face. Cause you said I stayed at the hotel. That's not a hotel, that's an inn. What's wrong with you? Nobody cares. Right? We know what you mean. Maybe that happened here. I don't know. But they are likely with family in the upper room. And if you know anything about Middle Eastern hospitality, there is no way that family would let you go stay at a public inn. Especially when you're pregnant, they made room for you somewhere. And where they made room is in the spot where the animals stayed a little bit.

Now, they had two kinds of wealth. They had gold and they had animals. That was it. So you took care of your animals. If you were a shepherd, you lived at the edge of town, and you had a big cave to keep your animals in because you

had a lot of them. If you lived in town, you may only have one or two sheep, a goat, a couple chickens, maybe a donkey. Just a few, right? And you would keep them in your house at night. And we think, oh, who would do that? How many of you have a dog? Where does he sleep at night? On your bed, probably, right? And it's a little bit like that. You let your animals out during the day, and at night you brought them inside, you had a spot for them where they stayed, kept them safe. They were worth gold.

And so they may have been there. And we see this going all the way back to the Old Testament. Remember the story of the Shunammite woman who builds a room upstairs for the prophet Elisha so he has an upper room to rest in, to stay. So this is very popular. And in fact, you can still find houses that are built today like this.

Okay, so it still continues on. Okay, so with all that background, probably more than you wanted, right? What do we learn from Joseph? Three things I want to talk about today.

Number one, **Joseph was obedient to the authorities**. When the Romans said, go home and get counted, he did it. Do you think he wanted to do it? Do you think there were things holding him back? Mary's pregnant, like, can't we like mail it in or something? You know, why do I gotta go home to be counted? Count me here, it's fine, right? Reasons not to do it. And we do that sometimes in our society.

I don't want to get too political here, but you know, about half of us are Democrat and the other half are Republican. And when the president wins from the other side, whichever side you're on, not my president, I don't have to listen to him. Guy's a yahoo. Next election, the other guy wins and the sides just switch. The other side's going, not my president. I didn't vote for him. Right? We have to be obedient to the authorities. As long as it doesn't violate God's word, we have a responsibility. Yes, there's things we can do to effect change and do those things. But be obedient to the authorities.

Number two, **Joseph was faithful to his family**, right? He took care of Mary even when he thought she had cheated on him and gotten pregnant. He's like, man, just let's do it quietly, be done with it. We see him taking care of her on

this two week trip. We see him taking care of her when the angel tells him to go to Egypt. Joseph was faithful to his family, took care of his family.

And the last thing, **Joseph was immediately obedient to God.** When the angel says, you can take her home to be his wife, what's he do? He wakes up and goes. When he awoke, immediate. When the angel tells him to go to Egypt, they go in the middle of the night. Now if you're in a one room house and it's pretty full, do you sneak out in the middle of the night? He gets up the whole house. "What are you doing?" Joseph goes, "we're leaving." "It's the middle of the night." "I know, but the angel said go." "The angel? I didn't see no angel." "I saw the angel. We're going," right? Did people think he was crazy? Maybe. Maybe. "I didn't see angels. You see an angel? I didn't see no angel." But he was immediately obedient to God.

So the question is, **what is God telling you to do?** What is God telling you to do? I don't know what God's telling you to do, but I think you know what God's telling you to do. And sometimes we think, well, if an angel came and told me what to do, it'd be a lot easier. Would it? The angel said, leave your house. I want you to move to Peru. Would it be easier just because the angel came and told you? I don't think so. I don't think so. I know there's been some times in my life where I would wanted some pretty direct instructions. You think, "I don't need an angel. If God just sent me a text, that'd be good." Now imagine that you got a text message and on your phone it says, from God. What would you think? The spammers have really upped their game. This used to say unknown. Now it says God. I don't know that we would believe it anymore.

And I don't know what God's asking you to do, but I know that you know what it is. Maybe God's asking you to stop something, something that you have in your life. A habit, a thing, a behavior. I don't know. Maybe God's asking you to do something, to be more loving, to be more generous, to fix some broken relationship, to humble yourself and go home at Christmas time and face that family member that you do not want to face and say, I'm sorry, Eat a whole bunch of humble pie. I don't know. But you know.

There's a story of a pastor who took a job in a new city and he did his research and he looked through the neighborhoods and he bought a house in the best neighborhood he could afford. He didn't have a lot of money, he's a pastor,

but he bought in the best neighborhood he could buy, threw himself into the work of the church. And over the years, that neighborhood went down and down and down. And the value of his house went down and down and down. And this was an issue of prayer that he wrestled with. God, God, why are you letting my investment just drop through the floor? I'm upside down. I owe more on the house than it's worth. What are you doing to me? And he wrestled with God over this. And he says one day the answer was as clear as a bell. He goes, I didn't hear a voice, I didn't see an angel, I didn't get an email. But the answer was there. And the answer was, I didn't give you that house on that neighborhood, on that street so that you could make money. I care about the people on that street. What a light shining difference that was to him.

Because like most of us, he didn't know everybody on the street. I don't know everybody on my street. He threw himself into doing that. And maybe that's what God's telling you to do, is to tell somebody about him. If you say you care about these people and you love these people, don't you want them to be in heaven with you? Amen. Maybe it's time to do that. But whatever God is telling you to do, I don't know what it is, just do it.

Just do it. With all respects to Nike, just do it. Be obedient immediately, not sometime down the future. Joseph obeys immediately. Christmas was a time where Jesus began to make a way to show us how to live, to make a path for us to follow.

And Joseph was already living that path. It's probably why God chose him. Turns out God knows what he's doing. So whatever that voice is telling you to do, listen.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you so much, Lord, for these stories. We can look back and be encouraged by how you were with them. And if you were with them, you'll be with us because your promises are good forever.

Lord, we're thankful for all that you do for us. The blessings that we have are just almost uncountable. Even when we're going through hard times, the blessings are uncountable. Lord, thank you so much.

Help us to be obedient to that little small still voice saying, I need you to do this. Help us not to push that away. Help us to embrace it, no matter how

scary that may be, to move out with it. Help us to find a way back home to you and help us to bring a whole bunch of people with us. In Jesus name, amen.