

## THE REAL Christmas Story

R.C. and Raleigh Hall had a problem one year. Business was too good. As they were selling stuff for the Christmas season, they usually wrapped gifts in the traditional red, white, and green wrapping paper.

But this year, they'd just run out. So R.C. went to the back and found some stationery paper that was a French paper that was very lacy and pretty, and he set it out to sell for 10 cents a piece. It sold faster than the regular wrapping paper.

The next year, they doubled down and bought some more, and it flew off the shelves. In the next several seasons, they began to print their own, and the wrapping paper industry was born. Today, the wrapping paper industry is valued at about 3.2 billion dollars a year, and you can still buy some at R.C. and Raleigh's store, Hallmark.

You know, the greatest gifts aren't, however, wrapped in beautiful wrapping paper. The greatest gift ever received actually came to us in swaddling clothes. It was Jesus Christ.

As we consider Christmas and its ties to the birth of Jesus, we must ask ourselves, what does the Bible actually teach about the birth of Jesus? What are some of the things that popular culture gets wrong, and why is it so significant that Jesus Christ was born when, where, and how he was born?

## INTRO

Because of its tie to the Christmas season, there's probably no more event in the Bible that is well known than the birth of Jesus. Because the holiday is wrapped in the idea of Jesus Christ as our Savior, that peace on earth, the goodwill to man is rooted in the story of Jesus. But it's ironic because there's probably no story that has gotten more wrong in popular culture than the birth of Jesus.

The story is actually only found in two of the four Gospels. And really, only one talks about the actual birth of Jesus. The other talks more about as an infant of how he was dealt with.

But because of that, there's a lot of mistakes and things that get added to it. You know, because I guess there's a lot of Christmas plays and a lot of movies and television that have to add characters to it. We have innkeepers and all the animals.

But really, the Scriptures only teach us that Christ was born and laid in a manger. We don't have anything that is told of the events of who were there in that situation. In fact, his birth was just one that happened on the way as they were traveling.

You see, Mary and Joseph had to go to Bethlehem because of the census. They had to go to be counted in order to be taxed properly. So they had to go to their native town, which was Bethlehem.

And that is where Jesus was born. We don't really have anything about the event that night other than he was born. And the text does tell us that he was laid in a manger.

But there's another misnomer there. And when most people think of a manger, they think of the stall for the animals. But the term in the original language just meant a feeding trough.

In other words, they didn't have a crib. They didn't have any preparations of where to place him. So, they used the best thing they could find, which was a feeding trough for the animals.

And were having to stay outside of a local inn or a place of stay because there was no room because of all the people that were having to come for the census. The story that's told in Luke, however, deals with some shepherds who were out in their field at night, giving us an indication of the time of year, which was probably not in the middle of winter. But nevertheless, these men are told by an angel of God to go and look for a sign, the sign of a baby laying in a manger.

And this child would be the savior of all mankind. They heed the word and that very night go and find the child lying there and recognize that they have been given a great gift. They have been able to see this child born.

That's the story of the birth of Jesus and Luke. Now oftentimes that story gets combined with another one that Matthew tells us about the magi or the

wise men who came from the east. But if you read the text carefully, you'll see that those men did not appear on the night of Jesus' birth.

In fact, the text explicitly tells us that they visited Jesus at a house. By the time they came, Jesus had already been born for several months, possibly even a year or two, depending as you look at the time that Herod uses to determine how he can get rid of this child. Because as the men came, they came to Jerusalem, thinking that would be where the king was, because that's what they were looking for, the king of the Jews.

Of course, Herod, looking at this as a possible person that might be after his throne, tries to subvert the men to get the information about this Christ, but they are warned in a dream about Herod and leave and do not return to him and go another way. Herod's revenge is to kill all the babies two years and under. So we can see there for the time frame that this story falls in.

The wise men never saw the shepherds. The shepherds never saw the wise men unless they just happened on one another as they were traveling through. They were not together on the same night.

But yet somehow these stories have become combined over the years when in fact they were two separate events. But that doesn't mean that these stories aren't significant. Why would Jesus choose to give this story, this momentous event, this probably greatest event in all history, and make the only eyewitnesses of it be just some common, ordinary shepherds? Simply, it was because the birth of Jesus, as amazing and spectacular as it is, was rather ordinary.

He was not born that you would think a great person would be born in, a king in a palace. He was rather a child that was born in unusual circumstances to a poor family that no one would expect would become something as great as he was. Well, maybe nobody except those wise men who came from afar.

Yet they weren't even looking for Jesus in the right place. They knew this great king would come. They had read the signs.

They were wise enough to seek him. But yet they found something very simple. But yet they still presented him gifts befitting of a king.

You see, the story of the birth of Jesus is the culmination of God's great plan for salvation. From the very beginning when man sinned, from the very beginning when we fell, God had a plan to redeem man through the seed of a woman. That a child would be born.

A child that would come and take away the sins of his people. And we see this prophesied throughout the Old Testament. We see Isaiah talking about that child that would be born.

A child would be born among them. We see Psalm 72 talking about the kings coming from afar to bring gifts to this child. We see prophecy after prophecy telling us where Jesus would be born in Bethlehem.

In fact, that's how the wise men, if they come to Jerusalem, end up in Bethlehem. They went and looked to the scriptures, and they said he'd be born in Bethlehem. It's interesting because all these stories show us that God had a plan for man.

And that plan was Jesus. When we think about the birth of Jesus, it's spectacular not in just the story but in what it represents. Oftentimes, we think about great people in our history, and oftentimes, we don't ever think anything of their birth.

We used to celebrate the President's Day, George Washington's birthday, and Abraham Lincoln's birthday. And of course, they combined it into one holiday now, President's Birthday. But we would celebrate their birthday not because of what happened on that day but because of who they became and what it represents.

The same thing is true for Jesus. His birth, though it was announced by angels, though it had supernatural events around it, simply was a child that was born that would become the Savior. See, it's what Jesus became.

He became a man without sin. A man born to bring a message of God, of good news, of salvation to all. That's what makes this event so special.

It's what Jesus became. He became the one to live a perfect life and to die for our sins. To save all mankind.

To come not as a king would be expected to come, but rather a child in swaddling clothes. The greatest present ever presented to mankind, coming in the simplest form. God became flesh and dwelt among us.

And because of that, we have a hope of eternity. As we think about this season, when people look maybe for the only time of the year to Jesus, we should always point out the truth from his word about his birth. But we should also emphasize the importance that Jesus is to the entire world.

To every human being, Jesus represents the chance to be made right and have a home with heaven. Because it's only through Jesus that we find the Father. And that's something worth celebrating.