

God Saves
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Allen Power

Numbers 21:6-9; Matthew 1:18-25

Have you heard about it? They're playing gospel music at the mall! This time of year we hear songs about salvation in secular places. Traditional Christmas carols are really music about the good news of the gospel.

A couple of weeks ago I was reading a devotional by Kay Arthur. She was recounting a time when she was speaking in New York during the Christmas season and was browsing in a major department store. As she browsed with the crowd through the "treasures of this world" her ear caught the familiar lyrics: *"God rest ye merry, gentlemen, let nothing you dismay, Remember Christ our Savior was born on Christmas Day; To save us all from Satan's power when we were gone astray. O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy; [She writes] There it was, the glorious gospel: "Christ died for our sins" (1 Corinthians 15:3). These precious words of reminder truly were "tidings of comfort and joy."*ⁱ

Traditional Christmas carols should touch us more deeply than just a sense of nostalgia from childhood. Christmas carols preach the good news of the gospel.

- *"Long lay the world in sin and error pining"*
- *"Light and life to all he brings, Risen with healing in his wings"*
- *"Bless all the dear children in Thy tender care, And fit us for Heaven to live with Thee there"*
- *"The King of Kings salvation brings, Let loving hearts enthrone Him."*
- *"Joy to the world, the Lord is come, Let earth receive her King, Let every heart prepare Him room,"*
- *"Radiant beams from Thy holy face, With the dawn of redeeming grace"*
- Even some modern songs tell the gospel story: *"Mary did you know that your baby boy would save our sons and daughters? Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you new? This child that you've delivered, will soon deliver you."*ⁱⁱ

We could go on and on but you get the point. The story of the baby in the manger is pointing us to our redeemer hanging on a cross and rising from the grave.

Big Idea: If we are followers of Christ, the comfort and joy we feel at Christmas comes from the reminder that He came to save us all from Satan's power. Believers should always celebrate Christmas in the shadow of the cross.

- As we study Numbers 21:6-9 you may find yourself wondering, "What does this have to do with Christmas?" We'll soon see the connection.
- In this passage we again find the children of Israel grumbling about "no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food [manna.]"

- Notice how they contradict themselves “no food” vs “worthless food.”
- “[T]he Lord sent fiery serpents” biting the people and many died.

Numbers 21:7–9 (ESV)

⁷ And the people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. ⁸ And the Lord said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.” ⁹ So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

- What does this have to do with Christmas? One of the great concepts we see in Bible study is that the Old Testament points to Christ.
- Chapter three of John’s gospel records Jesus quoting from this account in Numbers as He explained the gospel to Nicodemus.

John 3:14–15 (ESV)

¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

- Jesus was telling Nicodemus about being “born again.” *“Born to raise the sons of earth, Born to give them second birth.”*
- In John chapter twelve Jesus used this same imagery to point to the cross:

John 12:32–33 (ESV)

³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” ³³ He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

- The healing power of the bronze serpent on the pole in the Old Testament points to the eternal healing power of Christ on the cross. That’s why followers of Christ celebrate Christmas in the shadow of the cross.
- Let’s connect this directly to the Christmas story in the New Testament.
- When we think of the story of Christmas we tend to think of Luke chapter two and the account of Christ’s birth in Bethlehem. However, a crucial part of the gospel message of Christmas is in Matthew chapter one.
- Beginning in verse eighteen we learn about Mary’s engagement to Joseph and that she was “found with child” “before they came together.”
- Here we see things from Joseph’s point of view. We’re told that because Joseph was “a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, [he] resolved to divorce her quietly.”

Matthew 1:20–21 (ESV)

²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

- Can you imagine how overwhelming this was for Joseph?
- An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream.
- The angel told him that Mary had not been unfaithful with another man; the child was conceived “from the Holy Spirit.”
- Let’s pause there for an important point. The angel has just told Joseph that though Mary was pregnant, she had never been with a man; she was still a virgin. Jump ahead to verse 22:

Matthew 1:22–23 (ESV)

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³ “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).

- Today some argue that it’s not necessary to believe in the virgin birth to be a follower of Christ. I believe it IS essential. **Why is belief in the virgin birth essential? How does it impact my belief in all of scripture? How does this verse factor into belief in the virgin birth?** Heb. 4:15 (ESV)
¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.
- The belief that Jesus was fully God, fully man, and totally sinless hinges on belief in the virgin birth.
- Back to Joseph and the angel. As overwhelming as the immaculate conception of the Holy Spirit was, this was the BIG news, the GOOD news:

²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

- To quote Linus: “*That’s what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown.*” Linus says that after quoting Luke chapter two and that’s appropriate.
- But THIS is really what Christmas is all about: He came to save us!
- Naming Him Jesus was significant. “*The name Jesus means “Saviour” and comes from the Hebrew name, Joshua (“Jehovah is salvation”).*”ⁱⁱⁱ When the angel told Mary His name would be Jesus he added: “*He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.*”^{iv}

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- The bronze serpent God instructed Moses to raise on a pole in the wilderness is a picture of Christ “lifted up” on the cross to save us.
- Followers of Christ celebrate Christmas in the shadow of that cross.
- As the angel said to Joseph: “*She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.*”
- If we want to know what Christmas is all about, just listen to the carols:

“Remember Christ our Savior was born on Christmas Day; To save us all from Satan’s power when we were gone astray.”

- Those are really *“tidings of comfort and joy!”*

ⁱ Arthur, Kay. Lord, I Give You This Day .The Crown Publishing Group.

ⁱⁱ Songwriters: Buddy Greene / Mark Lowry Mary, Did You Know? lyrics © Warner

Chappel Music, Buddy Greene, Mark Lowry, Mary, Did You Know? lyrics © Warner

ⁱⁱⁱ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [The Bible exposition commentary](#) (Vol. 1, p. 14).

^{iv} [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Lk 1:32). Wheaton, IL:

Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Crossway Bibles.