

NO BARRIERS

Christmas 2020



Introduction:

- Everyone was shocked in 2015 when Isis began systematically removing historical monuments that did not agree with their perspective on life.



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[In 2015 the **Islamic State** militants attacked an ancient Assyrian city north-east of Mosul. An Iraqi parliamentarian] called for the international community to intervene and condemned the jihadi group for “erasing the history of humanity” ... *“The hand of terrorism insists upon erasing the history of humanity by erasing the heritage of the land of the two rivers amid the shock and astonishment of the world,”* the ministry said in a statement

[Isis attacks on ancient sites erasing history of humanity, says Iraq | World news | The Guardian](#) 10/03/2015

- In June 2020, many of us watched in disbelief as similar attacks on established cultural icons were destroyed in London, across America, and even in Australia, as groups attempted to “rewrite history” from their ideological perspective.

“Every record has been destroyed or falsified, every book rewritten, every picture has been repainted, every statue and street building has been renamed, every date has been altered. And the process is continuing day by day and minute by minute. History has stopped. Nothing exists except an endless present in which the Party is always right.” [George Orwell, **1984**]

- This is not a quote from a newspaper, reporting on riots, looting and general destruction in several nations during 2020.
 - These words were written by George Orwell to describe the dystopian fictional society of **1984**.

- It is a place where the endorsed ideology matters above all else. History, heroes, rights, and wrongs are illegitimate in the face of the Party's ideology.
- Sound familiar? Yet it was first published in June 1949!
- In 1948 Winston Churchill said to the House of Commons, “*Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.*”
- While not everything in our history is good, it is true.
- Only truth can guide us forward.
- Matthew, Luke and John open their gospels by setting the local story of Jesus in its world historical context.

Matthew tells the story in such a way that not only is everything previous to us completed in Jesus; we are completed in Jesus. Every day we wake up in the middle of something that is already going on, that has been going on for a long time; genealogy and geology, history and culture, the cosmos... God. We are neither accidental nor incidental to the story. We get orientation, briefing, background, reassurance.

[Eugene Peterson, in *The Message* preface to Matthew © 2004]

- So, what can we learn by reading and retelling the gospel accounts of events surrounding the birth of Jesus?
 - Firstly, lets avoid the “alternative truths” and “fake news” that surround the story:



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- What did the Innkeeper say to Mary and Joseph?
- How did Mary and Joseph travel to Bethlehem?
- What were the names of the wise men?
- How many wise men were there?
- Was it “the night that the animals talked”?

Romans 15:5 *Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.*

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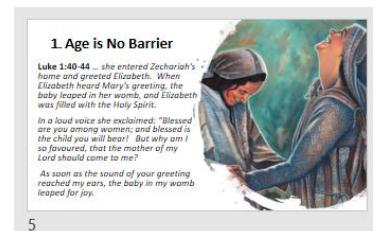
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- As we quickly glance at a few of the “lesser” characters in the story, we’ll be encouraged that there is NO BARRIER to meeting and knowing Jesus — or to telling others about Him — regardless of who we are, and what our background is.

1. Age is No Barrier

- Elizabeth was 6months into her pregnancy when the angel Gabriel visited Mary and told her that she would miraculously conceive the baby Jesus, who would become the Saviour.
 - Mary immediately left Nazareth to go to the “hill country of Judea” ... a treacherous journey that would have taken a couple of weeks
 - No trip planner, vehicles, or GPS at her disposal!

Luke 1:40-44 where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women; and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.



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When [in December 2018] the Queensland government passed laws that made all abortions legal, loud cheers erupted in the chamber. On the first anniversary of these laws being passed, Queensland's [then] Deputy Premier hosted an abortion party to celebrate.

(Wendy Francis 2020 [Meghan Markle mourns loss of precious life - Australian Christian Lobby \(acl.org.au\)](#))

- At a time when “it is estimated that 1 woman in 4 in Queensland of child-bearing age will have an abortion”¹, there are two astounding things for us (in 2020) to note here....

¹ Actually 19.7% according to the “children by choice” website accessed 12/12/2020

- (i) Elizabeth addressed the foetus in Mary's womb as "my Lord..."
- Mary at this point of time was only a few weeks at most into her pregnancy
 - Our first glimpse of our newest grandson was a scan at 6 weeks He measured 0.87cm (size of a millet or safflower seed from last week!)
 - All the DNA for the person he was to become was there – it was just a matter of TIME, not essence.
 - Jesus is here recognised fully and VALUED as the Person He was to become ... can we do less?
- (ii) John the Baptist leapt for joy at the sound of Mary's voice – as she was carrying Jesus.
- Elizabeth was 7-8 months pregnant, yet the baby responded with joy (felt emotion)
 - We are told that John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit from birth.
 - An unborn child is given SPIRITUAL VALUE as well as social and physical value.
 - EVERY unborn child has potential and value – what are we doing to support mothers whose child is conceived in difficult circumstances?
 - Age is no barrier to coming to learn about, to love and to trust in Jesus, our Lord.
 - Jesus Himself encourages us to come to Him with the love and trust of a little child.
 - We as a church need to welcome all the little ones in our midst and do nothing to hinder them coming to faith in Him.



1. Age is No Barrier
• Jesus was recognised and valued as the person he would become
• John the Baptist was given spiritual value before his birth and physical value before his birth.
• Every unborn child has potential and value in God's eyes.

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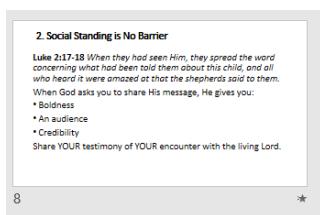
2. Social Standing is No Barrier

- The shepherds appear in every nativity scene played out from every kindy, school or other Christmas event celebrated around the world. But who were the shepherds, and why are they significant?



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- According to a Jewish documentary we watched recently, these shepherds around Bethlehem were most likely to be caring for the sheep designated for sacrifice at the temple in nearby Jerusalem.
 - The “manger”, according to this Messianic rabbi, could very well have been in one of the many caves in that area – where sheep often gave birth... a fitting site for the “Lamb of God” ...
- We all know the bit about the angels appearing and the shepherds rushing off to see the baby (presumably taking a lamb with them....) – but do you know what happened NEXT?



Luke 2:17-18 *When they had seen Him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at that the shepherds said to them.*

Shepherds were seen as outsiders, looked down upon, resented, made fun of, and despised by the rest of the community. Their reputation was so bad that they were not permitted to give testimony in a court of law because they were thought to be untrustworthy....

[The Shepherds | The Story of Christmas from the People Who Were Actually There #2 | pursueGOD.org](https://pursueGOD.org)

- God chose the very ones the world rejected to be the very first witnesses to His Son
 - God chose the silenced ones to share the news about Jesus with the world.
- When God asks you to share His message, He gives you:
 - Boldness (“don’t be afraid...” was the angel’s message)
 - A target audience (the people around them)
 - Credibility (people were amazed... no one can deny an eyewitness account; it will even stand up in a court of law!)
- Share YOUR testimony of YOUR encounter with the living Lord.

3. Life's Circumstances are No Barrier

Australian PM Malcolm Fraser famously said in 1971:
"Life wasn't meant to be easy".



Apart from mentioning Jesus' 12th birthday, and that he began His ministry at the age of 30, no-one else has their age mentioned in the NT... except Anna, the prophetess in the Temple when 8 day-old Jesus was dedicated in the temple. She was 84.

- Anna was widowed after only 7 years of marriage (at about 21/22)
 - The fact she lived in the temple "day and night" indicates there were no children from the marriage.
 - Most women in her situation would have remarried – she chose instead to serve the Lord.
 - She was allowed to occupy quarters in the temple apartments – this speaks volumes of her trustworthiness and character.
 - She lived in a male-dominated world where women were expected to be silent, unobtrusive, and subservient.
 - There was corruption in the politics and even the priesthood of the day. Life was not easy.
- Anna was well acquainted with grief and disappointment in life.
 - Grief can overwhelm us at times, but it should not define us
 - She could have lived with regret and heartache and loss, but instead looked forward in hope.
 - Her focus was not on herself, but on her Lord
 - He gave her hope and a future
- What are you focusing your attention on as you wait for God's promise to you?
- Life's circumstances are no barrier to knowing and serving the Lord... regardless of our age.

3. Life's Circumstances are No Barrier
• Grief can overwhelm us at times, but should not define us
• Instead of regret, she lived in hope
• Her focus was not on herself, but on the Lord.
• What is my focus as I wait on the Lord?

4. Culture is No Barrier

Matthew 2:1-2 “After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi [wise men] from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.”



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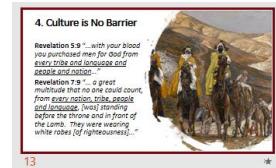
- They were “from the East” That could mean anywhere from Persia to India to Asia... but whatever their background & culture, they were a LONG way from home.
- Many scholars make the case that they were probably from Persia (800km east of Israel). They were very learned men (“wise men”) who, as a result of their studies, were convinced that a notable king had been born in Israel. Where would they have gotten that idea?
 - The writings of the prophet Daniel give a specific timeline (Daniel 9:24-27)
 - Remember, after Daniel was thrown to the lions (on trumped-up charges) the king retaliated by tossing his accusers into the lions’ den – thus eliminating the “old guard” who had stood against Daniel, who was elevated to chief “wise man” in Persia. Those who followed would have studied his writings
 - There was also the prophecy of Balaam (who lived on the Euphrates River near Persia) who (Numbers 24:17) specifically mentions a “star coming out of Jacob”.

- Whatever their background, they
 - Read and believed God’s word
 - Diligently sought to find Jesus
 - Recognised His worth (costly gifts)
 - Humbled themselves to worship him
 - Obeyed God rather than man



- Herod wanted them to report back to him, but God warned them not to... they were unafraid of this despotic ruler.
- Despite what you may read on social media, Christianity is NOT
 - “White man’s religion” – it began in the Middle East!!
 - “Western Religion” – there are more believers in African, Asian and South American countries than in Europe!
- The bible assures us that people from every tribe and tongue will be in heaven (Revelation 5:9 & &:9)

Revelation 5:9 “*...with your blood you purchased men for God from EVERY tribe and language and people and nation...*”

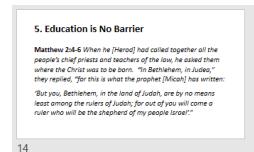


Revelation 7:9 “*... a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, [was] standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes [of righteousness]...*”

5. Education is No Barrier

Matthew 2:4-6 when he [Herod] had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. “In Bethlehem, in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet [Micah] has written:

‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel’.”



- King Herod summoned the “chief priests and teachers of the law” – the theologians of the day, to check out where the child was prophesied to be born.
 - This occurred some time (weeks? months?) after Jesus’ birth.
 - The temple was the “university” of that area, and these guys were the professors / tutors to all the students.

- They knew everything that went on in the temple – and if not eye-witnesses, they had certainly heard all the rumours / gossip / inuendo that buzzed in the temple quarters after Simeon and Anna had prophesied over the baby Jesus at his dedication.
 - The wise men turned up a few weeks / months after this.
- These guys had the answer at their finger tips – quoting Micah5:2
 - Did they go investigate also? Scripture indicates “no”
- There is a difference between “knowing” (head knowledge) and “faith” (heart acceptance)
 - Do we have “head knowledge” that does not penetrate our heart?
 - They had the opportunity – there were NO barriers – but they ignored it because of their own prejudices; preconceived ideas of who / what a Saviour would look like.
 - Sometimes the problem is not what we DO – it is what we DON’T DO that is the issue

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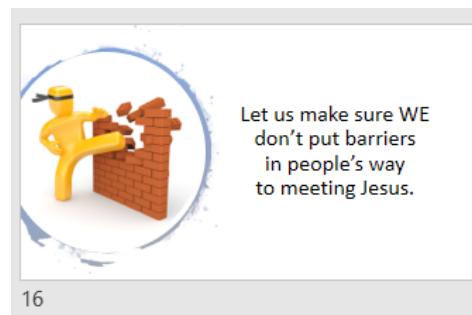
- There is a difference between “knowing” (head knowledge) and “faith” (heart acceptance)
- Our education can become of preconceived ideas / ideologies
- To be truly wise, our knowledge should lead us TO Jesus, not away from Him.

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James 4:17 “*Anyone then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.*”

- If we want to be truly wise, our education / knowledge should lead us TO Jesus, not away from Him.

Conclusion: Let us make sure WE don’t put barriers in people’s way to meeting Jesus.



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