**SEVEN STEPS TOWARD CHRISTMAS**

***Creation to Incarnation***

[Gift Video]

Jesus is the gift that was given to us by God in Bethlehem 2000 years ago. Because of Jesus, we have access to God that we could have no other way. He is with us every day, yet like everything else, it’s easy to forget to be grateful and take Him for granted.

He wasn’t always as available as he is now.

Let’s look back to the very beginning to see how and why God chose Jesus to reconcile mankind to himself…

1. **Creation**
	1. In the beginning – the earth was “formless, empty and dark”.
	2. God *(Father, Son and Holy Spirit)* created everything including man in his own image – He saw that *“it was very good”*
	3. Sin entered into the world however, separating God from Man.
	4. Sin and Evil became *so bad* that God had to do a “reset” (Noah/The Flood)
2. **Abraham** (2000BC)
	1. God reached out again to mankind, this time through Abraham and gave him a promise of “blessing”.
	2. God told Abraham that his descendants would “*bless all the families of the world*”.
	3. Abraham’s son Isaac, and grandson Jacob, went on to become a great nation, “the Israelites” but after many generations, instead of a “great Nation” became *captive slaves* in a country that was not their own (Egypt).
3. **Moses** (1450BC)
	1. God reached out to mankind again through Moses
	2. He raised up Moses to lead them *out of captivity* and slavery and *to the Promised land* that God chose for them.
	3. He gave them *a law* to follow (the Torah) to keep them from wandering far from God.
4. **Kings** (1050-586 BC)
	1. God desired to be their *King* and *Shepherd*. He gave them their land and made them a great and prosperous nation.
	2. They instead wanted an *earthly King* so they could be like other nations.
	3. God relented and gave them *Saul, then David, then Solomon and the rest*.
	4. King David, the greatest King in Israel’s history established a *city for God (Jerusalem)* and his son King Saul *built a temple*, to worship the one true God in the city in 1000BC
	5. Some kings *followed God’s commands* and lead the people into *obedience* and fellowship with the Lord where there was *blessing*, but *most did evil* and lead the people into disobedience and enmity with God where there were *consequences.*
5. **Prophets** (1020 – 400 BC)
	1. God spoke to the people through prophets urging them to *turn to God* and be reconciled to Him.
	2. Sometimes the people would *hear* the Word off the Lord and *respond.* Other times they *hardened their hearts* and did further *evil* in the sight off the Lord.
	3. Ultimately, the people rebelled against God, turned against each other, the nation was divided and God allowed them to be *conquered by their enemies*, and be *driven from their land in captivity.*
	4. Eventually a remnant of God’s people were allowed to return and *reestablish the temple* in Jerusalem in 516BC, but were not able to reestablish their kingdom.

***And then “nothing” happened…***

1. ***Silence*** (420 – 1st Century)
	1. This time period is called “400 years of Silence” from the last Prophet (Malachi - 420BC) until John the Baptist in the early 1st century.
	2. The *land and people* were *conquered and controlled* by several empires during this time including: the Babylonians, Persians, Greek, and Roman empires.
	3. Within Judea there were several conflicts and conquests including the time of the Maccabees and Antiochus Epiphanes (story of Hanukkah)
	4. The Roman Empire was one of the most brutal and expansive that the world has ever known, covering almost all off Europe, North Africa and the near East. Under them was Herod, the “Jewish King” who was willing to *kill all male babies* in Bethlehem out of fear off a new king.
	5. The period is marked as a dark and silent period with little or no significant interaction with God or the Prophets.

Think about what it must have been like to live in such darkness.

Even if you were a believe in God, you would know that you lived in a time off deep spiritual darkness where the *kingdom of Israel was long gone*, the *prophets were silent,* your people were now conquered by the most brutal and evil dictators the world has ever known.

Even the temple had become corrupt. The priests would exploit worshippers with exorbitant temple taxes to anyone who tried to come and offer sincere worship as the Word prescribed.

Evil prevailed in the cities, children and women were regularly abused, men were forced into war or slavery, food and water were scarce and the oppression upon God’s people became worse and worse every year.

It was a world with little to no hope.

Think about what this world would be like if there was no Jesus.

No prevailing teaching about *love, kindness, goodness and grace*.

Only *darkness and despair* under a more wicked and pervasive evil empire than you could ever imagine.

***[[[[ darkness ]]]]***

Those who stayed faithful to God however, held on to the hope that someday all the prophesies of Messiah would still come true.

They believed that the words of Isaiah would come to pass in their lifetime, that God would raise up a Prophet like Moses and a ruler like David in their lifetime;

**Prophecies like…**

**Isa. 9:2,6-7**

2“The people walking in darkness  have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

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**6**For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,
    and the government will be on his shoulders, And he will be called…
    Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
**7**Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.
He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.

…But it had been 700 years since that prophecy was written and the people were beginning to lose hope.

***then “something” happened…***

A flicker of light shone in the darkness, …the Messiah was about to arrive!

1. **Messiah**

First the news came from Jerusalem that one of the priests, an old man by the name of Zechariah had been visited by an angel and was told his wife *Elizabeth would have a son*, a prophet with the spirit and power of Elijah.

*Then something even more amazing happened.* A young virgin by the name of Mary was also visited by an angel who told her that she will also have a son and He will be called “Son of the Most High” and he will be given the throne of David.

**Luke 1:26-37** **26**In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, **27**to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. **28**The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”

**29**Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. **30**But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. **31**You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. **32**He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, **33**and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”

**34**“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”

**35**The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be calledthe Son of God. **36**Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. **37**For no word from God will ever fail.”

This is not just a fulfillment of Isa 9, (“Unto us a child is born…) but also Isa 7,

**Isaiah 7:14** “the Lord himself will give youa sign: *The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son,* andwill call him Immanuel.

(Immanuel/Emmanuel – God is with us!)

*This time God was not just reaching out to His people, He was becoming one of them.*

He was not just *sending another prophet or just another king*, he was *sending his only begotten Son* whom he is one with, to be born unto us, live with us, dwell with us, die for us and offer us everlasting life.

When Jesus was born, history shook. Nothing would ever be the same. The Devil who had a stronghold over planet earth was now doomed for destruction and the people who were walking in darkness, were about to live in the brightest light that ever shone on planet earth.

Normally, we would go right to the part where we talk about the shepherds and angels, Joseph, Mary and the baby in the manger. *(we’ll read that in just a bit with the kids)*

But here I want to talk about the apostle John’s description of what happened. It’s a bit different than the other gospels.

**John 1:1-14 “***In the beginning* was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2**He was with God in the beginning. **3***Through him all things were made*; without him nothing was made that has been made. ***4****In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.****5****The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

**6**There was a man sent from God whose name was John. **7**He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. **8**He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

***9****The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world*. **10**He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. **11**He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ***12****Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God*— **13**children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.

***14****The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us*. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The people were no longer walking in the despair of Hopeless darkness.

Jesus was here….*and in him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

Friends, that light is here right now, with us. Jesus said he’d never leave us or forsake us, and he is here with us now.

The world is still a very dark place, so much heartache, tragedy, bloodshed, devastation and injustice. The difference is that because Jesus is “here with us”, we have *hope and power* that those living in the “silent years” did not.

But what about those in these times who are *still* experiencing that same type of darkness?

We see darkness every day, murder, suicide, drug-deaths, atrocities, and Evil.

Jesus promises us that if we follow him, we will have His light in us.

**John 8:12**  “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

This past year many of us experienced great loss and sadness. Some of you are going through it right now, at Christmas. The truth is that while we are in the world, *we will have tribulation*, but Jesus says we can be off good cheer, for he has *overcome the world.*

**John 16:33** “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

This year we lost a dear dear friend and companion, *Joy Vanderhoof.* Those who knew her, know that she was the most encouraging, inspiring, kind-hearted, friend that you can ever imagine. She loved Jesus with all her heart, and *absolutely loved North Shore Fellowship* so much that *she gave all she had in her final years to serve here*. I was alone at her bedside when died suddenly on Aug 1st.

If she was not walking with Jesus, it would have been nothing but dark sadness, but because she followed Him so closely her passing was a victory celebration of a life well-lived and an entrance into her eternal reward.

All because off the light that Jesus brought into this dark world that night in Bethlehem.

Jesus was born that night not just for *them then*, but for *us now*.

Immanuel – God was with them then, and is still with us!

How about you? Do YOU feel the light of Jesus in these dark days?

Jesus wants to be the light in your life. The light that no darkness can overcome.

He could have come at any time though the history we just walked through or any time after that. He came at the right time however, and since he came then, we can receive Him now.

(From our Series Uncomplicated Grace)

**Galatians 4:4-5** “When the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children.”

The time *was right;*
•Israel was under three layers of oppression: High Priests < Herod < Rome
•Joseph and Mary had grown to marrying age.
•Caesar’s census - brought them to Bethlehem

Jesus was not born at a *random time* for a *random purpose.*

He was born at *just the right time* when all the prophesies that he needed to fulfill would fall into place. He was *born*, *lived*, died, rose and ascended right on schedule. To buy our freedom and adopt us. He will return on God’s schedule as well.

Your time to live is *now*. *Your time to believe upon Him* and receive adoption is also now.

Let this Christmas be the one where you *feel him* the closest, *honor him* the most, and *“adore Him”* more than you ever have before.

That’s the real “Good Tidings of Great Joy” to you and to all people!

**Merry Christmas to you all…, let earth receive her King!**