**TEN CHARACTERS OF CHRISTMAS**

R. Giglio 12-18-20

The Christmas story is centered around what is called the “Holy Family” (Jesus, Mary and Joseph). Jesus’ birth, life death and resurrection are the most significant events in history, and all began with the faithful obedience of an obscure young betrothed couple named Joseph and Mary of Nazareth.

Every Christmas either parts of their story or the entirety of it is depicted in Movies, songs, plays, articles and sermons. Each time the Christmas story is told, we see the roles of many different supporting characters who played significant parts in the story of Jesus’ birth, some before, some during and some after.

Some of these are well-known, others are more obscure. Some played a major role, while others offered a smaller contribution to the story, each of them however, is noted in scripture and are important to the story of Christmas.

Today we will take a glimpse of a few of these characters and see how they teach us timeless lessons of obedience, courage, and faith.

1. **GABRIEL**

(God is My Strength) Considered an Archangel

He was the messenger God sent to tell of the births of both John the Baptist and Jesus.

***To Zechariah regarding the birth of John the Baptist…***

**Luke 1:11-13, 18-20**

**11**Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him [Zechariah] , standing at the right side of the altar of incense. **12**When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. **13**But the angel said to him: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John.

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**18**Zechariah asked the angel, “How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.”

**19**The angel said to him, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. **20**And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time.”

***To Mary about being the mother of Jesus…***

**Luke 1:26-37  “**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 called[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%201&version=NIV#fen-NIV-24929b)] the 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.”

Gabriel was sent to “break the silence of the 400 years”. He spoke first to Zachariah *and* told him the miraculous “good news”, that he and his wife would bear a special son sent from God even in their old age. He was not deterred by Zachariah’s doubt but used it as an opportunity to bring about a confirming sign as he was mute from until the prophecy was fulfilled, and John was born.

Soon after, he was sent to Mary and given an even more unbelievable message, that she was to bear a son, conceived not by a man, but by the Holy Spirit.

Gabriel was standing in the presence of God, when God gave him the task of delivering two “impossible messages” to two very unlikely recipients. He did not delay or doubt, in fact he gave us an eternal promise that confirms and affirms God’s word to us even today, especially when we doubt

*Gabriel taught us; “For no word from God will ever fail.” (Gabriel – Luke 1:37)*

1. **ZACHARIAH &**
2. **ELIZABETH**

John the Baptist’s parents were way past child-bearing years when they received the message of the promise of John’s birth. They apparently had not given up praying for a child. Elizabeth particularly received the news with great joy and gratitude. The two of them “quarantined” for the remainder of the pregnancy, but Elizabeth, particularly spent those days thanking God, rather than worrying about her high-risk pregnancy and her mute husband.

**Luke 1:23-24“**When his time of service was completed, he returned home. **24**After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. **25**“The Lord has done this for me,” she said. “In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people.”

*ZACHARIAH & ELIZABETH teach us to never doubt God, but always be grateful.*

1. **JOSEPH**

Mary’s husband was a humble, faithful man, who apparently loved her very much. God chose him to raise his only begotten son. This is an honor that often goes unnoticed, especially compared to the great honor his wife Mary was given as the Mother of the Lord.

**Matt. 1:18-21 & 24-25** “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. **19**Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yetdid not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

**20**But after he had 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. **21**She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,[[f](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%201&version=NIV#fen-NIV-23166f)] because he will save his people from their sins.”

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**24**When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. **25**But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Joseph seems to disappear after Jesus was twelve years old. He may have died, or just become distant from the family in some way. What we know of Joseph is that he was faithful and trustworthy.

*Joseph taught us that if we are willing and trustworthy, God is willing to trust us with the most important jobs in the world.*

1. **MARY**

Mary is in many ways the leading person in the Christmas story (besides Jesus himself). She was probably about 15 years old when Gabriel told her the miraculous news of the birth of Jesus. She questioned but did not doubt the message. She willingly gave herself to the purpose of God and did so faithfully and obediently.

Her simple response to Gabriel’s message showed tremendous humility, obedience and faith.

**Luke 1:38** “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.”

*Mary taught us the importance of being humble and obedient, so that God can do amazing things through us and in us.*

1. **THE SHEPHERDS**

The shepherds were probably poor laborers, working for a landowner or livestock farmer. Usually the ones working the nightshift were not the highest-level employees, in fact they were probably much like migrant workers and actually “lived” out in the fields with the animals. [much like today’s Bedouins]

The shepherds were chosen by God to be the first to be given the good news of Jesus’ birth. They carried this honor and faithfully and joyfully.

**Luke 2:8-20**

**8**And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. **9**An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. **10**But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. **11**Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. **12**This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

**13**Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

**14**“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
    and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

**15**When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

**16**So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. **17**When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, **18**and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. **19**But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. **20**The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.”

The Shepherd taught us Evangelism and Worship, They “Spread the word” about Jesus, and returned “glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen”.

1. **THE ANGELS**

These are the *Herald Angels we heard on High, who told us to Hark, as they were sweetly singing ore the plain*.

Initially it was one angel, who completely terrified the shepherds when he appeared and said;

**Luke 2:10** “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.”

If that wasn’t enough, he was soon joined by what could have been thousands of angels that probably really freaked them out;

**Luke 2:13-14** “And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: **14**“Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”

*The angels taught us to celebrate the good news of Jesus with song, praise and exultation.*

 Most of the lyrics to the greatest Christmas carols of all time, are taken from these verses about the angels.

1. **THE WISE MEN**

The Bible calls the Wise men “Magi” (wise kings). Many people assume that there were only three wise men because of the three gifts that were mentioned in Matt 2:11: gold, incense, and myrrh. However, the Bible does not say there were only three wise men. There could have been many more. Some traditions say that there were three and that their names were Gaspar/Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar/Balthazar, but since the Bible does not say, we have no way of knowing whether the tradition is accurate.

The Bible does say however, that they followed a star to come and worship the king of the Jews to bring him their gifts.

**Matt 2:1-2, 10-12 “**After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem **2**and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

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**10**When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. **11**On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. **12**And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.”

The Magi, although likely not Jewish, brought Jesus many expensive gifts; gold, frankincense and myrrh and worshiped Him as King of the Jews. Jesus’ family was living in a house when they came to worship him, which means that they remained in their ancestral village while Jesus was a toddler. Immediately after they departed, Joseph was told by an angel to go to Egypt to escape Herod’s Massacre. While they were probably not wealthy travelers, they were not poor immigrants either. The gifts of the Magi provided them with the resources they need to go to Egypt and then return to Nazareth to raise their son.

*The WISE MEN taught us that God will provide, sometimes from the most unlikely sources, what we need to follow His will. “Where God guides, God provides”.*

1. **SIMEON**

The old man at the Temple who was told by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he saw the Messiah (Christ);

**Luke 2:25-35 “**And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name *was* Simeon, and this man *was* just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. **26**And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. **27**So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, **28**he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said:

**29**“Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace,
According to Your word;
**30**For my eyes have seen Your salvation
**31**Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples,
**32**A light to *bring* revelation to the Gentiles,
And the glory of Your people Israel.”

*Simeon taught us to wait for, and never doubt, the word God has spoken to us, even in our old age.*

1. **ANNA**

*(TASHA ASAY)*

*When we put ourselves in the presence of the healer we will be whole.*

*When we wait for the Lord, we won’t miss it when He shows up.*

***Luke 2:36-38*** *“Anna the prophetess was also there, a daughter of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher. She was by now a very old woman. She had been married seven years and a widow for eighty-four. She never left the Temple area, worshiping night and day with her fastings and prayers. At the very time Simeon was praying, she showed up, broke into an anthem of praise to God, and talked about the child to all who were waiting expectantly for the freeing of Jerusalem.”*

*When I was 21 a godly woman gave me a book called, Her Name Is Woman. It was the first time I heard anyone talk about Anna. My middle name is Anne - after my grandmother Anna. One of my earliest memories is sitting on the lap of my grandma’s father- my great grandfather as we watched the sun sink down on his farm in Lancaster, PA. The sun broke through the clouds and he remarked, “Today would be a great day for the Lord to return.” It was apparently a thought he had often, one that my grandmother repeated to my mother and one that my mother would repeat to me - but remixed. Mom, I want to go the movies with my friend- her response- Is that where you want the Lord to find you , if he comes back, on a Sunday? I used to roll my eyes and stay home. But it wasn’t a bad way to be raised. It kept me out of some degree of trouble - when the question became internalized- What if Jesus comes back and I am here? But it also kept me in mind- Jesus is coming back!*

*Two weeks ago, Pastor Raphael showed us how dark a place the world was in which Jesus was born. The intertestamental period where God was silent and yet here is Anna- a prophetess during that time. Anna was a young widow, but she was a woman who wasn’t destroyed by her heartbreak. She put herself in the Temple every day. We sometimes think of the Temple as being like church. But it’s not really comparable. This was pre- Pentecost. This was THE place on earth where God chose to put his spirit. Close to the Spirit, close to the presence is where Anna chose to be and not doing busy work. She devoted herself prayer and fasting. This lady was a 100-year-old powerhouse. God looks at the heart. Anna’s heart was Faithful- everyday she put herself close. Anna’s heart was passionate- She told everyone who she saw. Anna’s heart was whole. I say this confidently because she committed herself to being close to the Spirit of God. Wholeness comes in the presence of God. When I am hurt and broken by life’s disappointments and tragedies, if I put myself in the presence of the healer I will be whole.*

*When I wait with expectancy for the Lord, He is going to show up and I won’t miss it.*

*You know what I love? Scripture doesn’t mention the reactions of the priests. They weren’t watching. They were in the same building but their hearts were on a different planet. To them Jesus was just another circumcision just another Jewish boy getting his name. But to Anna He was the one she had been waiting for. We show up expectant and see what God will do. We posture our hearts in humble expectancy without agenda and we will not miss it when He arrives.*

*Our waiting is the same and different. We are waiting for the Messiah to come and make all things new and whole and right. The difference is we know when He is coming. Soon. HE is coming sooner today than yesterday. Here’s what Matthew 24:14*

*“Staying with it—that’s what God requires. Stay with it to the end. You won’t be sorry, and you’ll be saved. All during this time, the good news—the Message of the kingdom—will be preached all over the world, a witness staked out in every country. And then the end will come.”*

*What about you? Is this Christmas- another Baby Jesus cute and cuddly? Can you feel the weight of his birth? Can you feel the pressure of the World as it waits for his second coming? Paul describes it as birth pains. All of creation groaning. We want Jesus to return.*

*So I know that it’s a hard time. There’s a global pandemic. There is political unrest and Christmas is busy even so. But I think Anna asks us two questions : Are you hurting are you beat up? Come close to the presence of God, won’t you? When we put ourselves in the presence of the healer, we will be whole.*

 *Are you waiting for the Lord to come back? We’re here with a purpose to stake a witness in every country. Keep at it. Keep looking for the places where God is moving in your neighborhood, in your family, and around the world.*

*Anna teaches us;*

*When we wait for the Lord, we won’t miss it when He shows up.*

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THE TEN CHARACTERS OF CHRISTMAS, TEACH US TEN IMPORTANT LESSONS:

1. GABRIEL: “For no word from God will ever fail.” (Gabriel – Luke 1:37)
2. ZACHARIAH &
3. ELIZABETH taught us to never doubt God, but always be grateful.
4. JOSEPH taught us that if we are willing and trustworthy, God is willing to trust us with the most important jobs in the world.
5. MARY taught us the importance of being humble and obedient, so that God can do amazing things through us and in us.
6. THE SHEPHERDS taught us Evangelism and Worship, They “Spread the word” about Jesus, and returned “glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen”.
7. THE ANGELS taught us to celebrate the good news of Jesus with song, praise and exultation. Most of the lyrics to the greatest Christmas carols of all time, are taken from these verses about the angels.
8. THE WISE MEN taught us that God will provide, sometimes from the most unlikely sources, what we need to follow His will. “Where God guides, God provides”.
9. SIMEON taught us to wait for, and never doubt, the word God has spoken to us, even in our old age.
10. ANNA *teaches us; When we wait for the Lord, we won’t miss it when He shows up.*

There’s One more Character of Christmas who is often overlooked;

THE HOLY SPIRIT…

We don’t often associate him with Christmas, and he is not mentioned in most of our Christmas Carols and songs.

But, we cannot ignore the Spirit’s engagement with no fewer than six different characters in the Christmas story:

* John the Baptist - Lk. 1:15 “He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even in his mother’s womb”,
* Mary - Lk. 1:35 “The Holy Spirit will come upon you”,
* Elizabeth - Lk. 1:41 “The baby leaped in her womb and she was filled with the Holy Spirit”,
* Zechariah - Lk. 1:67 after he regained his speech - “He was filled with the Holy Spirit and began to prophecy
* Simeon - Lk. 2:25–26 “The Holy Spirit was upon him and told him he would not see death until he saw the Messiah,

The Holy Spirit as part of the Trinity, was present from the beginning of time.

He was there in every part of the Christmas story, and is with us now.

*[He truly is the “Holy Ghost” of Christmas, past, present and future]*

The name “Holy Spirit” may have been left out of most of our Christmas Carols and popular Christmas songs,

But let’s not *leave Him out* of Christmas.

Let’s invite Him to *fill every moment* of our Christmas celebration.

Let the Holy Spirit fill you with his comfort, wisdom, love and power this Christmas.

***Have a Happy, Healthy, Merry and “Spirit-filled” Christmas!***