

### Luke 2:1-14

<sup>4</sup> Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, <sup>5</sup> to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. <sup>6</sup> So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. <sup>7</sup> And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. <sup>8</sup> Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup> And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. <sup>10</sup> Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. <sup>11</sup> For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup> And this *will be* the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." <sup>13</sup> And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: <sup>14</sup> "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

**(Picture 01 Starry Night)** I love being out at night. Have you ever stayed out all night under the stars? Especially in the winter when the sky is clear and you can see more of the heavens. About 15 years ago I had a job driving a delivery truck at night out in the countryside. It was so peaceful and beautiful. You could look up and see the stars shining down.

This evening I want to talk about 4 special nights. The first night is just after God finished creating the world. The second night is just after Adam and Eve sinned. The third night is the night that Jesus was born. And the fourth is the night after Jesus gave his life for us.

Let's go back in time. Way way back. Back to the beginning of all things. The stars shone brightly on this clear cool night. Something wonderful had been accomplished. God looked down on His creation and it was very good. **(Picture 02 Garden of Eden at night)**

This first great night was when God had completed His work of creation. The world was beautiful! All of nature lived in peace and tranquility.

All of this creation was perfect. No sick or wounded animals or people. The humans were always healthy, physically, emotionally and spiritually. **(Picture 03 healthy, happy Adam and Eve)** No arthritis, headaches, diabetes, cancer, high blood pressure, heart failure or any of the thousands of things that can go wrong with us. In all of this God was glorified.

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Now let's move forward in time to the day when sin came into the world.

The stars were not shining on this cloudy night. Something terrible had been accomplished. Satan had convinced man to rebel against God. **(Picture 04 darkness)**

In rebelling human beings gave up the right to rule the world. Now nature turned against itself and against man. **(Picture 05 Lion Eating)** What God had rightfully given to mankind, mankind had given to Satan. The once beautiful life in this world turned dark and cold and deadly.

Instead of the peace and tranquility there was every kind of distress and disorder. And there was bloodshed. The world had been corrupted and as a result death had come to living, breathing beings. Even human beings began to kill. Fighting and wars came. **(Picture 06 war)** If all of the blood that has ever been spilled in killing were collected together it would probably fill an ocean.

Paradise was gone. The beauty of nature was ruined and so was the health of human beings. Now people would die of disease, injury or old age. The flesh began to lose its power. Aches and pains became a part of everyday life.

Sin came into the world and brought death and destruction. Darkness and fear replaced the glorious paradise. **(Picture 07 Leaving Eden)** Yet even then God pointed to hope for the future. He said that one would come who would crush Satan and his grip on the world. In this too God was glorified.

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**(Picture 08 Baby Jesus)** Rush ahead in time again to another night. The stars shone brightly on this clear cool night. Something wonderful had been accomplished. God looked down on his Son lying in the manger.

On the night Jesus was born shepherds were in a field nearby. **(Picture 09 Angel and Shepherds)** An angel came to them, full of the glory of God. The shepherds were terrified. But the angel told them not to be afraid. He brought them a wonderful message. "A Savior is born!" He is the one who will release the world from death and despair. **(Picture 10 many angels)** Then many angels appeared and all sang. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" (Luke 2:8-13)

The baby grew up and became a man himself. He reversed the power of sin. Through him we can receive real life and be free from the power of Satan in the world. **(Picture 11 Jesus Teaching)** Jesus can release us from the power of Satan and give us life in God. Life which never ends, like God made it to be.

But how did the baby grow up and do this?

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Let's go forward in time about 33 years. It was at the age of 33 that Jesus gave His life on the cross for us. **(Picture 12 Jesus on the Cross)** The stars were not shining on this cloudy night. Jesus suffered the guilt of sins He did not commit. He taught about love and forgiveness. He brought salvation to us. But those He came to save killed him. Yet his very dying was what they needed in order to be saved.

There is an old story that took place years ago when merchants traveled the oceans in ships made of wood and powered by the wind. One of these ships was caught in a storm. **(Picture 13 Ship in the Storm)** In the middle of the storm the ship hit a reef, miles from land. It ripped a huge hole in the bottom of the ship. The sea water rushed in faster than the crew could pump it out and the ship began to sink. The wise old captain told his crew that they were sinking and would probably all be lost at sea. There was only one chance of saving the ship and those aboard. To do this a man would have to dive into the water, find the hole in the hull and plug it with his body. The captain asked if anyone would volunteer. One sailor stepped forward immediately. With deep sadness the captain led him to the place where he needed to dive into the water. At last the captain, overcome by grief

grabbed the sailor and hugged him. Then he turned away as the man dove into the sea. In a moment the hole was plugged and the lives of all those on board were saved by the one man's sacrifice. When the ship was safely docked the body of the sailor was reverently removed from below the water. As he was carried to land the captain wept. A new sailor standing by commented to another how much the captain loved his men. The older man replied, "Yes he loves his men. But didn't you know? That man was his own son."

At Christmas time we look both backward in time and forward. We look back to the little baby in a manger. We love that scene so beautiful and peaceful. But Jesus came to give his life for us. It cost God the life of his precious Son to redeem us from sin.

It was a dark night when Jesus died. But that isn't the end of the story. God turned this tragedy into victory. It was God's plan from the very beginning to show how much He loves us. Jesus died on the cross, but He rose from the dead! **(Picture 14 Empty Tomb)**

Jesus appeared to the Apostle John in a vision. What He said is written in Revelation 1:17 and 18, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forever more, and I have the keys of death and hades." Because He died and rose again, He has the power and authority to give us eternal life!

Death is a sad fact we live with. But at this time of year we celebrate life. The life of a Baby born for us and the eternal life we have in Him. We will all die someday. But if we have faith in Jesus we know what is beyond death. **(Picture 15 Heaven)** Life! He will bring us to God the Father in Heaven!

At Christmas time Christians celebrate that night 2,000 years ago when the baby Jesus was born. **(Picture 16 Christmas Tree and Manger)** It is a time of joy and good news. Yet it cost God so much. It cost the life of Jesus, His Son. Let the meaning of Christmas, and the glory of what God has done be on your heart and mind as you celebrate it.