



How many times have you heard and told the Christmas Story?

The arrival of the baby Jesus prophesied to a young Mary by the Angel Gabriel, announced to a group of shepherds in a field, turned away by an innkeeper, eventually born in a manger, and then visited by wise men or kings (depending on your bible translation).

The story of Christmas is such a beautiful story that has been retold countless times and in countless ways, in Hollywood movies and children's plays.

Each time I hear it, I'm struck by the way it is told as if the arrival of baby Jesus was the beginning of the story.

This is usually where we start, in the book of Luke 2:8-14 (NIV),

"And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'" Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

Often, the only backstory we tend to get is the angel who visits Mary to tell her that she will conceive the "Son of the Most High".

Or of Joseph wanting to divorce Mary when he found out she was pregnant, only to be convinced by the Angel of the Lord to marry her because this child will be the Savior of all humanity.

What we don't often hear is the full backstory - the "why" of the arrival.
Yet, the arrival of the baby Jesus is meaningless apart from this backstory.

In order to grasp its significance, we need the whole picture of Christmas and why it matters.

But it does not start here in the fields with the shepherds.
It doesn't start in the manger with a baby.
It doesn't even start with Mary being chosen of God to carry this child.
The story of Christmas starts at the beginning of time.

And it actually starts in darkness.



It's a darkness that is empty, lifeless, and hopeless.
But into this darkness, God, the creator, speaks.

In Genesis 1:3, God says, "*Let there be light*".

And with that declaration of light, God brings fullness, life, and hope into the world.

It is into this light that humanity is birthed. On a tiny piece of rock floating through the universe, God creates a beautiful, amazing, and wondrous paradise that we are to call home. He fills it with beauty and diversity, birthed out of the Creator's unlimited creativity. And the crown of his creation, are two new creatures made in his image, Adam and Eve. With them, God begins a beautiful and intimate relationship that he desires to continue for generation after generation.

Wouldn't it be nice if the story ended there?

A Happily ever after, where we walk with our creator, a loving God, in a beautiful world, lacking nothing.

But there is a curious thing about love.

Love cannot be forced.

Love cannot be coerced.

Love cannot be purchased.

Love must be chosen.

Love must have boundaries.

In order for love to thrive, we must choose to remain within the boundaries of that love.

Because when you move outside of the boundaries of that love, it becomes an act of separation.

But let's get back to our story.

In this beautiful garden paradise, the voice of an antagonist appears in the form of a serpent. And that voice convinces Adam and Eve that what they want for themselves matters more than what God wants for them. A voice that tells them they could be masters of their own destiny, creators of their own identity, that they in fact could become just like God.

It's a voice we still hear loud and clear today in the world.

Adam and Eve chose to listen to that voice and that choice cost them...and us, dearly.

Would we really have chosen any differently?

The consequence of that choice was separation. A physical and spiritual separation from the very one who breathed life into us. And just like that, we're back to the beginning, in darkness. But this time the darkness isn't just all around us, the darkness is also in us.

I think we could all agree as we look around our world today that the darkness is real. The further humanity gets away from God, the deeper the darkness feels all around us. And although we hope it's getting better, we all sense that this journey into the depths of darkness is not over.

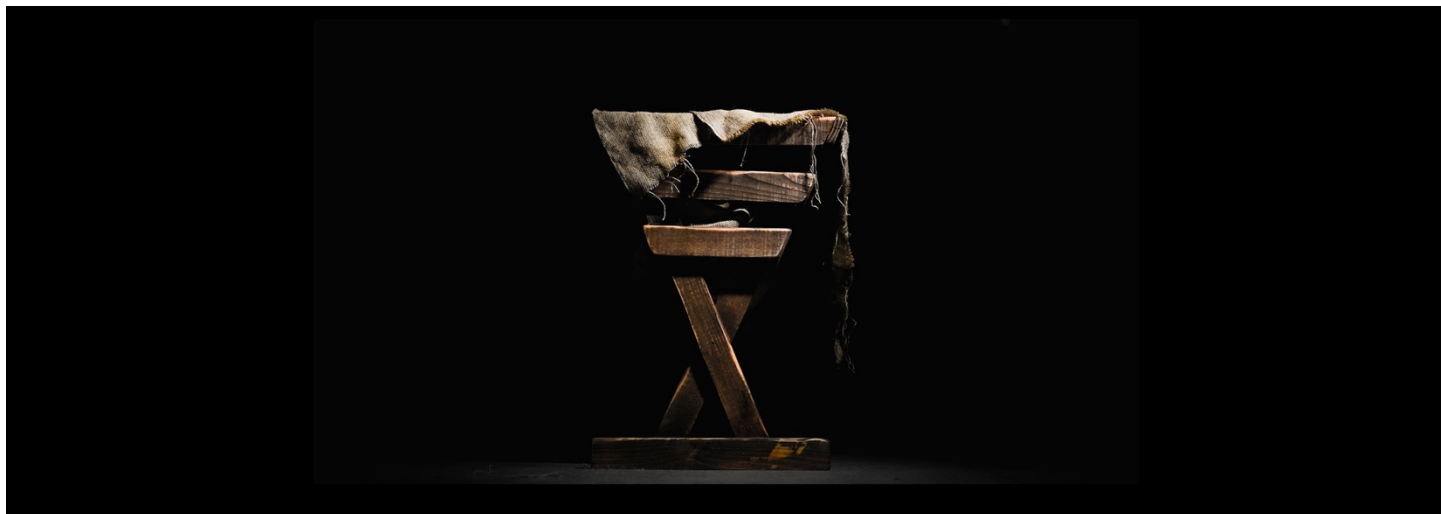
How tragic it would be if the story ended here.

It would be like when our favorite show series is cancelled without resolving the tension of the storyline, one we were so invested in with the characters, one that we had hoped would end well.

But the story doesn't end here. God loves us too much to let this be the end of the story.

Which brings us back to the field with these shepherds and that angelic announcement.

Once again God announces the light to the darkness, this time through a miraculous human birth. A Savior for all humanity, to bring us out of the darkness and back into the light, his name is Jesus, Immanuel, God with us.



Of this Jesus the apostle John says in John 1:4-5 (NIV),

"In him is life, and that life is the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

Ahh, light. But, once again, we are faced with a choice.

Jesus himself says in John 8:12 (NIV),

*"I am the light of the world. Whoever **chooses** to follow me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (emphasis added)*

Remember, love is a choice.

When we make this choice to follow Jesus, we are reconciled back into that original intimate relationship with our Creator that was severed so long ago.

Paul says it this way in 2 Cor 5:17-18 (NIV),

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, they are new creation: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ ..."

In Christ we are re-created. We are immediately spiritually reborn and back in a right relationship with our creator. What a beautiful reunion.

The story could end here, but it doesn't. This Christmas story is ongoing.

It's heading toward an eternal future with Him, a truly "Happily Ever After".

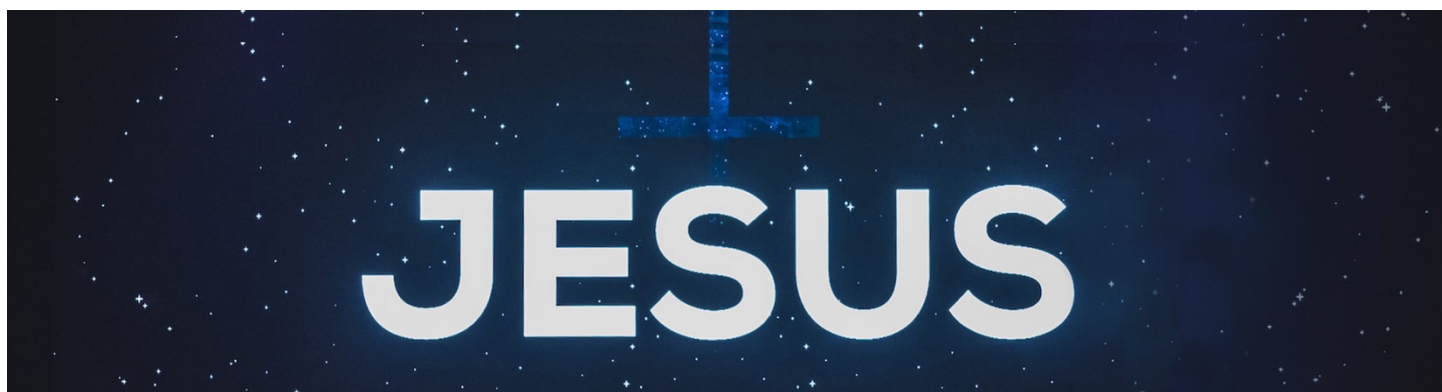
It's a future that actually takes us back to what was intended from the beginning.

There will be a full re-creation. A new heaven and a new earth and a new body, that Revelation 21:4 (NIV) tells us will have *"...no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*

In fact, no more darkness AND no more need for light (Rev 21:23), because God himself will be our light and we will live with him for ever and ever.

This is the Christmas story in all its fullness.

It's the story we need to tell, not just once a year, but every day.



It's the Good News of Jesus Christ.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 (NIV)

This is why we celebrate Christmas.