

Where are the Signs for Christmas?

12/22/24

Some years ago, York County Parks changed their system for handling the large crowds that would come to the park Christmas light show that's held every year. They decided to require park users to purchase their tickets online before they made their journey to the show. The problem was we still had many who never got the notice or didn't care and they would come up to the show without tickets. To try to solve this problem, the park put two large LED lights along Mt. Zion Road before you came to the park. Then, we put about 4 signs along the road before you come to the parking lot. These signs are reflector signs so your vehicle headlights make the signs reflect. All the signs state you need prepaid tickets to enter. The first year was horrible. We had people always asking us in the parking lot if they need prepaid tickets even though they had past several signs before coming to the show. This year has not been as bad. We still get a few who question about the signs. We have to have a sign for everything. Every time I go to court for a case, the judge will ask about park signage. If we have none, good chance we'll lose the case. Some of you may remember a hit rock song in the 70's by the Five Man Electrical Band called "Signs" where the song began with, "signs, signs, everywhere signs". People need signs. Just think what this world would be like without signs. It would be total insanity. However, we do have signs and they are not something new. God would give signs to people as well in the Bible. Now, God didn't use the signs we use today, He would use different kinds of signs and we'll see today that God used signs during the Christmas story.

Let's start by turning to Isaiah 7: 13 - 14. God is talking through Isaiah the Prophet to King Ahaz, who was the king of Judah at this time. Israel was split into two countries at this time – Israel and Judah. King Ahaz was an evil king. Judah was under attack and God tells King Ahaz that He will give him a sign that God will destroy their enemies. However, King Ahaz doesn't want a sign, so God gives Him this verse we read about a prophecy into the future instead. We read this, "You exhaust the patience of God as well! All right then, the Lord himself will choose

the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel – ‘God is with us’ (NIV)” There is some who question the prophesy of this verse, but we can call this a dual prophesy. Many pieces of Scripture in the Old Testament that is spoken through the Prophets have been found to have dual prophesy. In other words, the prophesy can have more than one meaning. Remember, anything is possible with the Word of God. What we do know is that an angel of the Lord used this verse in Matthew 1: 23 to let Joseph know about the baby Mary was going to carry in her womb. So, we do know that God gave the people in the Old Testament a sign. When they see a virgin who gives birth to a son, He will be called “Immanuel” which means “God is with us”. This is another name given to Jesus and Jesus means “The Lord saves”. So, God is letting the people know during Isaiah’s time, they need to keep an eye out for the sign God had given them. When they see it, then they will know God’s Word is unfolding in front of their eyes. This child would be different. This child will be formed or conceived through Mary and the Spirit of God. The angel of God tells Joseph this in Matthew 1: 20. The Hebrew term for “sign” in Isaiah 7 means this: a signal or event that communicates a supernatural event or miracle as a sign from God (Strong’s Concordance). To put this in human terms, the angel of God gives the signal to Joseph and Mary about them becoming parents of the Son of God. When Jesus is born, this signal then becomes the supernatural event and miracle that comes from God. The Christmas story we celebrate is a supernatural miracle from God. The Christmas story is actually a sign from God to us and we must respond to it just like Joseph, Mary, and others did when they became witnesses to the sign from God.

God didn’t stop there with signage about His Son that was born to carry our sin to the cross thirty years later. God continues with signs in the New Testament as well. Let’s read from Luke chapter 2 where we read this, “² In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while^a Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ And everyone went to their own town to register.

⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was

expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

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. (NIV – Biblegateway.com)"

So, we see that Mary gives birth to Jesus in Bethlehem because of the census that was being done by the Roman Empire. To add to this, remember this is all part of the plan of God. So, Jesus is born and laid in a manger. While this is being done, some shepherds near by get a visit from an angel of the Lord. The angel tells them what just happened concerning Jesus and the angel states in verse 12, "This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger" (NIV). The Greek term for "sign" means a miraculous sign, signal, miracle, wonder (Strong's Concordance). This Greek term goes in the same footsteps as the Hebrew term we talked about earlier. The angel tells the shepherds the miraculous sign which is a miracle and will make them wonder is a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. This strong Greek term is telling the shepherds that this baby is a miracle, so the baby is no regular baby. It is the Son of God.

So, the sign from Isaiah has been fulfilled and the angel gives another sign to the shepherds. Now, like with all signs, we have a choice to make – to ignore the sign or to obey the sign. When you see a speed sign along the road, you have the choice to obey that sign or to disobey the sign or to ignore the sign. We read from Luke that the shepherds did this, “When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, ‘Come on, let’s go to Bethlehem! Let’s see this wonderful thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.’ They ran to the village and found Mary and Joseph. (NLT, 1541)” The shepherds talked among themselves and made the choice to go and look for the sign. They did not ignore it. They actually ran to look for this baby wrapped in cloths. These shepherds were excited. I’m guessing they made the lambs they had go into a fenced in area since verse 20 states they went back to their flocks or maybe the angels kept watch over them while the shepherds went to look for the sign. I like to think the angels kept watch over the flock. Anyway, they ran to see Jesus with excitement. They wanted to see the sign and they found Jesus just as the angel had told them.

The shepherds made the choice to go look for the sign and they did. Now, they have another choice – what to do after seeing the sign fulfilled. We read from Scripture that the shepherds told “everyone” or “spread the word” what had happened to them. I can picture it now as the shepherds are looking upon the face of Jesus, they can’t hold in what the angel had told them about this little baby – the Son of God. They’re grabbing everyone who is nearby and telling them about the Good News. They are excited. They are so excited, that we read in verse 20 that they went back to their job glorifying and praising God for what the angels had told them and because they had seen the child just as the angel had told them. They had witnessed the sign themselves and they were excited. We celebrate the birth of Jesus as well, but how do we celebrate? The shepherds were excited. I bet they remembered their encounter with baby Jesus every year at the same time and I bet they did the same thing they did in the first encounter – they told everybody about Jesus. These shepherds would never be the same again because they went to look for the sign, and they found Jesus, and they went to tell everyone. When God gives us a sign, we must follow it. When we find it, we must enjoy it and let others know about it. Christmas time should be a time where we tell others what Jesus has done for us. We should be praising the Lord and glorifying Him for how He has changed our lives and made us anew. We should be just as excited today for Jesus just as the shepherds were on the first Christmas. The question is are we?

There is something else we can learn about this story. When the shepherds saw the sign, they were excited and told others about Jesus. There was someone else there that witnessed this event of the shepherds. It was Mary. Scripture tells us, 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. (NIV). While the shepherds were celebrating, Mary treasured this miraculous event and pondered them in her heart. The Greek term for “pondered” means to dispute with, to confer with, to engage in (Strong’s Concordance). In others, Mary chewed on this whole miraculous event about Jesus. Not only is Christmas time a time to reach out to others and tell them about Jesus, but Christmas time is also a time where we think about and wonder what does Christmas really mean to me? I talked to someone awhile back that was questioning God because they never thought about God and they were now. They wanted to stop thinking about God and I told them not to stop, but continue to “ponder” (I didn’t use this word, but it is a better word to use here) about God. The Lord gave us a mind – use it. I’m sure, Mary would continue to ponder Jesus as He grew up into an adult. We should be still pondering Jesus every Christmas. Why would Jesus allow Himself to come upon this earth and then die upon a cross for such a sinful human race? That is something to ponder. So, this Christmas, are you excited? Are you telling others about Jesus? Do you still ponder about Jesus? If not, maybe you need to ask Jesus to allow His Spirit to help you this Christmas to be excited about Jesus and to ponder about Him.

NLT Life Application Study Bible. Tyndale House Publishing, Inc.: Wheaton, 1996.

The Strongest Strong’s Concordance. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2001.