

So, this morning, even before we look into the Word, we'll look to the God of this Word, the One who spoke first and everything came into being. When God said, "*Let there be light*," everything became visible. We need that same God to speak into our hearts this morning and speak into our minds because Scripture says, "*The entrance of His Word brings light*." It is His Spirit that gives us revelation and understanding.

Father, this morning, we come to You and we surrender before Thee – our bodies, our minds, our hearts – our entire being. We offer it to You as instruments of righteousness and we pray, Lord, touch us. We need You, Lord. We need You. I need You to speak; we all need You to hear. Unless You speak, nothing will happen here for You alone have the words of life. Speak life into our inner beings, Lord – Your life. Cleanse us afresh. With Your precious blood, sanctify us that our inner man will hold the Word that we hear and it will remain fresh in our hearts. Cleanse us, purify us, and fill us once again. We wait at Your feet. For in Jesus' Name we pray, Amen.

Three weeks, less than three weeks and another year will be here. Another year is waiting for us. We don't know what 2016 holds for us. We don't have to be afraid because we know Who holds 2016 for us. That's our confidence – that our God is always sovereign, always in control. If you were there for the past few Pastors' Conference, we were looking at the Shepherd's Psalm or *Psalms 23*, the most favorite psalm of all time. But today, we are going to look at the Christmas story. We are going to separate fact from fiction and one fellow we will keep out of the Christmas story is that fat fellow in red. We'll keep him out because he is not there. But if there was one person who walked on earth, who was a true sheep and allowed God to shepherd His life from birth to death, absolutely trusting His promises, His ways, His power and His providence, it was Jesus Christ. If *Psalms 23* is true in its entirety, about anybody, it is about Jesus. He came as the Lamb of God and then, He was the One Who died as the Sheep that takes away the sins. Before ever He could become the Shepherd of our souls, He had to become the Lamb of God and be that sheep that was led to slaughter and yet, did not open His mouth.

We will look at the Christmas story today. Of the four Gospels, only two Gospels give us an account of Jesus' birth and all the circumstances around it. This morning, I want you to put aside all the Christmas movies you have seen, Christmas drama, Christmas stories; put it all aside because much of it has nothing to do with the real story as seen in the Bible. By the time we finish today's meeting, some of you will be really shocked to see what actually happened on Christmas Day. What happened when Jesus was small? Everything that we have been hearing for months, for years about God's sovereignty, God's ways being different from our ways, how to be totally subject to His will, how to utterly trust Him with every minute detail of our life, how true God is to everything that He has spoken in His Word, everything we will see played out in Jesus' life. Jesus is the true Sheep that will become that Great Shepherd one day.

The actual Christmas story does not begin in the *Gospel according to Matthew* or *Luke*. It begins in *Genesis 3:15*. That's the verse that will define human history. That's where it is said,

Genesis 3:15

¹⁵ And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel."

Remember, this is where it begins. Once God has spoken this, everything that happens in the Bible, everything in human history is connected with this one proclamation – her seed, the seed of the woman. In English, it is seed and in Telugu, it is child. But you need to realize, in English, when you use the word 'seed,' it is never said with a woman; it is only said with a man. But Jesus is not the seed of the man, He is the seed of the woman. Man has got nothing to do with the birth of Jesus Christ. That is why the virgin birth is so important. But we will not get into all this about the serpent's seed and the woman's seed. It is too much. It is a different message altogether. Because there are two seeds flowing side by side, both human, one is the seed of the woman; the other is the seed of the serpent and they are in enmity with one another. The seed of the

serpent are not snakes; they are human beings. So, you will see, in the next generation, the seed of the woman is Abel; the seed of the serpent is Cain. Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob, Saul and David. Through it all, in human history, this line will divide. Jesus will call them sheep and goats, wheat and tares. From *Genesis 3:15*, plays out human history. But before we look at Jesus, when He is born, let us look at one verse in the Bible that describes how He came.

Philippians 2:6-7

⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, (He was God), ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

He is God; He is equal to the very God; yet, when He comes in the likeness of men, He comes as a bondservant, a bondservant of His Father, of no reputation at all. This is the most important event in human history – God becoming Man. There is nothing greater in human history. Yet, the entire Bible has only one verse that will describe His birth, one verse alone – *Luke 2:7* – just one verse describing the birth of God as a human being.

Luke 2:7

⁷ 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.

This is the only verse in the Bible that describes His coming to earth. It's a very important verse. He is wrapped in rags. He is put in a stable, in a wooden trough. And when God comes to visit man, to earth, the first thing we tell Him is, "No room for You." Remember, this is Jesus, God's own Son. For once, everything that is happening, is happening in the perfect will of God, the perfect way of God, the perfect provision of God, the perfect timing of God. This is how God decided His Son should come. In *Galatians 4:4*, Scripture says,

Galatians 4:4

⁴ But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law,

Fullness of time, God's perfect time. We will never understand God's ways. Why should God's Son come down? Why should He be born under the law? Not even just a Jewish law. Now, there is another law over the Jewish law, which is the Roman law. "If you wanted to send Your Son born of woman, why didn't You send during the time of David? Why not Solomon?" Or may be when Josiah was the king of Judah. Or Hezekiah? Why now? But God says that it is in the fullness of His time that Jesus came. When the Promised Land is under the power of Rome, a Gentile nation; place, time, everything is chosen by God. Remember, there are no accidents here. Everything is planned by God. A poor carpenter and a young teenage girl; chosen as parents. Don't let TV preachers tell you something else. I'll prove to you from Scripture. His parents were extremely poor. When the fullness of time came, God moved the heart of a Gentile King. In *Luke 2:1* says,

Luke 2:1

¹ And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.

Proverbs 21:1 will say,

Proverbs 21:1

¹ The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, Like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.

Where is the king's heart? In the hand of God. When the fullness of time came, God moved Augustus' heart and said, "Let there be a census." These are not stories; these are real people. Of all the Caesars, the most powerful Caesar was Augustus Caesar. Do you know we all remember Augustus every year for thirty-one days? Every year when August comes, we don't realize, it is named after this man and July is from his uncle, Julius Caesar. God touched Caesar's heart. Caesar ordered a census in the Roman Empire. But the census was also very clear. In *Luke 2:3*, everyone had to go to his own city. You couldn't take your census wherever you are; you have to go to your city. Scripture says in *verse 4*,

Luke 2:4

⁴ 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,

Why did God do this? Because over five hundred years, He had spoken through a prophet Micah, in *Micah 5:2*,

Micah 5:2

² "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting."

Everything about our God, when He comes as Man, is little. He made Himself of no reputation. *O Bethlehem, you are little among the thousands of Judah.* If David had not been born in Bethlehem, we wouldn't have known of Bethlehem at all. After the conquest of the Promised Land, when Joshua divides the land for each of the tribes, when he divides for Judah, he doesn't even mention Bethlehem. I'm sure most people sitting here don't know that there are two Bethlehems. One Bethlehem is in Judah. The Bethlehem you will see in *Joshua 19*, is in Zebulun. One Bethlehem is very close to Nazareth, nine miles away. Other Bethlehem is very far away. But He's called to go to the Bethlehem that is little and faraway; Bethlehem Ephrathah.

God doesn't think like we do. He said, "Five hundred years earlier, I have spoken and that is where My Son will be born." His Word will always stand. His sovereignty and ways of God, who will understand? How far is this Bethlehem from Nazareth? In kilometers, it is more than one hundred and fifty kilometers. It's further than Warangal is from Hyderabad. If you were Joseph and Mary, you would ask, "Lord, are You very sure? Do You really want us to go there? There's a Bethlehem nearby. Will any Bethlehem do?" "No, you have to go to Bethlehem, the city of David." "Lord, don't you see, my wife is about to deliver?" Do we understand God's ways? When we say, "God is our Provider," do we understand the ways of His provision? Joseph and Mary don't even ask, "God, are You sure You are in control?" Timing is chosen by God. This is not happening six months earlier or six months later. When they reach, in a very short while, she has to deliver. If it was chosen six months earlier, they would have registered and gone back. If it were chosen six months later, the baby would have been born in Nazareth and not in Bethlehem.

I don't even know, though we have all these pictures in Nativity stories with a donkey looking like this, we don't even know whether he had a donkey. How long will a pregnant woman take to walk, ninety-two miles or a hundred and fifty kilometers? Today's women, if they walk ten kilometers, they will deliver on the way. That's why every second delivery is a C-section, because they have no strength. In the ninth month of her pregnancy, Mary is walking a hundred and fifty kilometers, to obey the will of God, passed through the decree of a Gentile emperor. Does it sound like the Gospel we hear? And when they reach there, *Luke 2:6-7, verse 7* will say, when they reach there, it says, "*There is no room.*" No room. Is this God's provision? Have you ever thought that God could take His own Son in the womb of this mother, reach a place and see to it that there is no room because the stable was His provision for them? Because there was no room in the inn. The Gospel uses the word 'inn' only twice. They are two different words. One is in the story of the Good Samaritan; that's more like a larger room with mattresses all over the floor, rough mattresses on the floor, where you get to sleep if you pay the innkeeper a little money. This is a much smaller, dirtier place. And behind the inn, like it was dug out in a cave, is the stable. There was no room in that inn and in that stable was where He was born. Now, read *verse 6* carefully. I don't know how it is in Telugu but read it.

Luke 2:6

⁶ So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered.

What does that mean? How many days were there before she delivered? Scripture is not clear. We want to think she reached by twenty-fourth evening and by twenty-fifth early morning she delivered and by twenty-fifth evening, they left. That's not what Scripture seems to imply. Here are the earthly parents of the Lord Jesus Christ, staying in a stable and there was no room for them all those days. If you were Joseph, if you were a man and your wife is going to have your first baby, you'd go out everyday to see if there is some place. There was no room for them in Bethlehem. A great preacher, Spurgeon said it this way, "Why did God do it this way?" Because we always have this question: where God leads, He provides. The question is: are we content with God's provision? Is there any doubt that it is God who is leading Joseph and Mary and His provision for them is a stable? God always provides whom He needs. The thing is: only a surrendered heart will be content with God's provision. This is what Spurgeon says, "You may tremble to approach a throne, but no one needs to fear to

approach a manger." Therefore, the Son of God was born in a manger, in an animal's trough, in a stable. Everyone is welcome to approach Him. When Scripture says, "He made Himself of no reputation," it began at His birth. Because we have so much confusion about these things, when everything is moving according to God's plan and is going quietly. First Christmas has no resemblance to the Christmas dramas we will see this month. That is why it is a *nataka* (drama); not real. A homeless King born in a stable, wrapped in rags, asleep in a trough. The King comes quietly into the world He created, just one line. *She brought forth her first-born son.*

I ask this question: when Mary's contractions began, was any woman there to help her? Did the innkeeper's wife help her? We don't know. The Bible is just silent. You see, when I was five years old, I grew up in another country. Those days, it was very much like Jesus' time, little better off, we had electricity, we had running water and there was one bus running everyday, up in the mountains. People usually went on horses or donkeys. Hospital was there, no ambulance, nothing. I was five years old. I still remember the teacher next door knocking at the door, power had gone. He asked my mother, "Can you give me the lantern?" Mother asked, "What happened?" He said, "My wife is delivering. I have to take the delivery." My mother was shocked. She said, "You are taking the delivery!" He said, "Ya, I have taken all the other deliveries also."

When I read this, I always imagine Joseph with the lantern, probably, taking the delivery because there is no room for the pregnant woman. Who is going to come and help her when she is delivering? Because people choose to ignore, because if you look, then you have to say, "Okay, come to my house," it is better to ignore. Did Mary think, "Is this what Gabriel meant, 'You are blessed among all woman?'" Any sister sitting here, if you hear an angel come and tell you, "You are most favored, blessed of any woman," would you think of a situation like that? Is this what it means to be chosen for the greatest event by God in human history? That's why God picked Mary because Mary had accepted His will before she understood what it was.

To understand God's ways, we don't have to know everything. We accept it by faith. No room, no crib, no doctor, no midwife; husband and a stable; first delivery. No relatives coming with gifts and by the way, Mary's mother was not there, nor was Joseph's mother. A young couple, all alone but with one difference – with God's Son for company. Question is: for that company, how much are you willing to give up? You see, it is not that they lost; they gained. They may have lost in the amenities of the world but they gained in that the Son of God was born in their arms. Because our major issue is this – we are discontented in life with what we have because we are not content with Jesus. If you are content with Jesus, then it doesn't matter whether it is little or more because your contentment is not connected with things; it is connected with a person.

He made Himself of no reputation. It's not like you see in the Christmas drama. There were no sheets or cushions – wrapped in swaddling clothes. Later, one day, He will tell a disciple who wanted to follow Him, "*Foxes have holes, birds have nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest His head.*" If he had asked Him, "When did that happen?" He says, "From the day I was born." John will say, "*He came to His own but His own did not receive Him.*" He was a man who was rejected, a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. That's the story, the actual story of Christmas. There was no Santa Claus going around giving gifts. The Son of God came. He was ignored by everybody. The only ones who made some space for Him were the animals, probably, in the stable. Because they were probably grateful that three thousand years earlier, when the ark was built, He made some room for them. And the birth is not announced to anybody; not in the city, not in the palace, just to few shepherds, poor shepherds. In *Luke 2:8*, Scripture says,

Luke 2:8

⁸ Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.

Poor shepherds, nobody else was told. And in *verse 12*, they were given a very clear sign.

Luke 2:12

¹² "And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."

Did you see why it was only told to them? If you were a rich man, if you were given this sign, will you believe and go? "A *Baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger,*" they will say, "No god will come like that." Did you see our God? And then, the angels will sing. See angels who sing. And now, when Christmas comes, we will all sing. Be careful when you

are going around singing; somebody may beat you up. When I was small, when I was young, people used to come just for money and before they come, they will a notice in the house, "This group is coming, this group is coming, this time, this time.." One time, one set of young people came, they put batteries in their stereo, recorded the songs and put it on and played it and asked for money. How different from the songs in the Bible!

There are four songs in the Bible connected with Jesus. The first song is sung by Mary. We are not looking at the songs but I am saying there are songs in the Bible. That is why we sing during Christmas. Her song is a song that comes out of obedience. Mary, though she was simple, she understood the heart of God. Years earlier, Samuel had spoken to the first king of Israel in *1 Samuel 15-22*, he had said this that obedience is better than sacrifice,

1 Samuel 15:22

22 Then Samuel said: "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams.

Do you know that Mary never tried to cut a deal with Jesus, with God, with the angel when Mary was told that you would bear the Son of God? She didn't say, "God, can You make it possible that I get to marry Joseph very fast, that nobody will know that I am pregnant? Before I say yes to You, will you talk to Joseph first?" You know, Mary never cut a deal with God. She didn't understand; she just trusted and obeyed. She said, "I am the Lord's servant. Let it be unto me according to Thy Word." Therefore, God gives Mary a song. That is Mary's Christmas gift – the song that comes out of obedience. That's the first song.

Then, there is the second song from the man who did not believe when he heard. Mary believed when she heard. Zechariah did not believe when he heard. So, God said, "You are like the Thomas who will come later, who will only believe when you see. So, you keep quiet for nine months." So, nine months later, John comes. He sees and he believes. Now, his mouth is open. Zechariah also will sing a song. Now, because we came to Zechariah, I have to go there for the sake of the pastors. Go to the *Book of Zechariah 1:1*,

Zechariah 1:1

1 In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet,

Zechariah and Malachi are the last prophets in the Bible. Then, the Bible will stop. When Zechariah is introduced to us – *Zechariah the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo*, his father and his grandfather's name is also there. It's very rare. So, whenever God does strange things like that, you must ask, "Lord, why did You do this?" Each of the names means something. Zechariah means – '*whom God remembers*'; Berechiah means '*Jehovah blesses*'; Iddo means '*at the appointed time*'. So, the three names put together means – Jehovah remembers and blesses at the appointed time. Elizabeth means '*God's oath*'. After four hundred years of silence, when the New Covenant begins, it begins with Zechariah and Elizabeth. What does the names mean? God remembers and blesses at the appointed time. Four hundred years later, steps into the New Covenant, Zechariah and Elizabeth, which God says, "God remembers His oath." From them, in their old age, will come John, who will proclaim, "Jesus is coming." So, Zechariah also will sing. It's a prophetic song of deliverance. That is Zechariah's Christmas gift.

Third song is the song of the angels. It's a song of proclamation that the Savior is born to be King and the fourth song will come from the mouth of an old man called Simeon, forty days later. The question is: do we have a song? They all had songs. Except for the angels, all of them were poor; they hardly had anything. They were very simple people. When Christ came in, they all had a song. Scripture will say in *Luke 2:16*, the shepherds left everything,

Luke 2:16

16 And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger.

Do we hurry when it is something about Christ? The shepherds, the first time they heard about Christ, they left everything and they hurried. They came with...? We have to put a stopwatch and say, "At eleven, we will close." Ask yourself, "When was the last time you hurried because it was about Christ?" We too are called shepherds, a different kind of shepherds. Do

we ever make haste for the things connected with Christ? Will we ever be found on time? And they were given one sign – “*In the city of David,*” very clear. Don't go anywhere else. In the city of David. “*You will see a Baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.*” That's Christ, the Savior. You see, that's the only sign that was given to them. See, we want to believe something else because it suits our conscience from disobeying God. You have to listen to some of the preachers who will make Jesus' birth into something that is not there in the Scripture at all. *Galatians 4:4*, shall we turn to *Galatians 4:4*? What does Scripture say?

Galatians 4:4

⁴But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law,

He came under the law. Do you know, though He was king, He came under the law, not above the law? He was not above the law or outside the law? Because there's one problem with Pastors, because many Pastors believe that the rules don't apply to them. Here is the Great Shepherd coming, the King of Kings coming, He comes *under the law*. Not just the law of God, He comes under the law of Caesar too. *Under the law*. That is why *Luke 2:21* will say,

Luke 2:21

²¹And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child,

I ask this question: “Jesus, why do You need circumcision? Circumcision is a sign that in your heart, you are separated unto God. Do You need a sign? The whole of heaven knows that there is no one who is separated unto the Father like You. If there is anyone who is led by the Spirit, completely led by the Spirit, it is You. But You will say, “I did not come outside the law, I came under the law.”” We are not under the law of the Old Covenant but we are under another law called the law of life, the law of Christ. The question is: are we under that law?

It is the rabbi of the synagogue who usually does the circumcision. On the eighth day, Jesus, I believe, is taken to the rabbi and he circumcises. I don't call him a rabbi; I call him a butcher. You know why? You know butchers, when they cut, they have no feeling at all. First time when they cut, they must have had great feeling. After that, they lose feeling. We don't know how many circumcisions this rabbi did but every circumcision is a spiritual act. It is a holy act unto God. Your hearts can get so hardened. Remember little baby Jesus, He is circumcised. Look at the rabbi's hands, it is covered with blood. He is the first man to have the blood of God's own Son on his hands – the blood that forgives, the blood that cleanses, the blood that heals, the blood that delivers, the blood that overcomes the devil. It is of no effect on him because his heart is uncircumcised.

Tomorrow, around the world, many, many Churches will raise worship leaders, will raise servants of God. They will handle the living Word of God, the Word that cleanses, the Word that heals, the Word that delivers, the Word that sets people free, but like the rabbi in Bethlehem, it will have no effect on them because their hearts are uncircumcised. That is what happened to the Pharisees, the experts in the law of God. They handled the Word of God daily but the Word of God had no effect on them because they only profited from the Word of God. Brothers, let ministry never become a profession for you and me. We will end up like the rabbi of Bethlehem. Jesus is circumcised and He hears the rabbi say, “What is His name?” And Joseph says, “Yeshua.” No effect. Blood has no effect; Name has no effect; Son of God has no effect. Do not let the Word of God be of no effect in our lives.

We have to see the Christmas story as it unfolds, as Scripture records it. Because by this month end, people will make that beautiful, nice looking stable, Joseph and Mary and the Baby and all the animals. Then, a few shepherds holding lambs and three kings putting gifts. Not true, brother. Not true. I can prove it to you from Scripture that it is not true. First, let me tell you – the Bible nowhere says that there were three wise men. No number is given. It could be two; it could be four; it could be more; we don't know. These wise men are called the Magi. They are learned men from the East, men who studied the stars, and therefore, they probably were from Persia. Probably among their ancestors, they knew Daniel was a great man; Balaam was the first prophet to prophesy a star would come. They may be well versed with the prophecies of Daniel. They probably knew how to calculate the seventy weeks of Daniel from the time the decree has been made. These are people, who believe when something great happens on earth, there is something that happens in Heaven. That is why when they come in *Matthew 2:2*, look to the question they ask,

Matthew 2:2

² *saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."*

They are very clear, "Who is He Who is born the King of the Jews?" Because Daniel's prophecy says, "It's the anointed ruler of His people." But wait a minute, Scripture says in *verse 1*,

Matthew 2:1

¹ *Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea...*

They come and ask, "Where is He Who has been born?" They didn't come when He was born. They came after He was born. While, to the shepherds, in *Luke 2:11*,

Luke 2:11

¹¹ *"For there is born to you this day..."*

This day, and the shepherds sign in *verse 12* is, we saw that, "A Baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." But when the wise men go in *Matthew 2:9*,

Matthew 2:9

⁹ *When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was.*

It is not written 'Babe', it is written it's, 'a young Child'. That's how it is written. In the original Greek, it is not Baby; it is Infant. Did you see this? It's not a Baby and *verse 11*,

Matthew 2:11

¹¹ *And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.*

It's written 'house' in Telugu? The Baby is not in the stable; it is in a house. It is not a Baby; it's a young Child. We make all the stories together and make one *khichadi* (hotch-potch). Are we getting the picture? Because you cannot present a lie to the people and say, "Our God is true." Let me tell you – if you read clearly, you don't even know, they are in Bethlehem. When they asked, "Where is He to be born?" They all said, "In Bethlehem." But Scripture says, "They were following the star." Where the star took them, we don't know. But we presume, it is Bethlehem. We can't even definitely say, 'it is Bethlehem', but we presume, we believe it's Bethlehem. We're only looking at Scripture, not looking at any fanciful stories of man. Let's go to *Luke 2*. We looked that He was circumcised. Now, we will look from *verse 22* onwards,

Luke 2:22-24

²² *Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord* ²³ *(as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the LORD"),* ²⁴ *and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, "A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."*

You know something that's interesting here? If you or I were Jesus in our thinking, we will tell Mary, "No need to go. How can My birth make you unclean?" She goes under the law. He comes under the law. "Under the law, I've made Myself low. If you give birth even to Me under the law, you are considered unclean." But wait a second. What law? To offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord – a pair of turtledoves or pigeons.

Now, listen carefully, pastors. *Leviticus 12:2*, first thing what it says is this,

Leviticus 12:2-3

² *"Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'If a woman has conceived, and borne a male child, then she shall be unclean*

seven days; as in the days of her customary impurity she shall be unclean. ³ 'And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.

Verse 3 will say, "On the eighth day." He could be circumcised on the first day but the mother cannot enter till the eighth day. So, you waited till the eighth day and then, took your baby. And then, *verse 4,*

Leviticus 12:4

⁴ 'She shall then continue in the blood of her purification thirty-three days. She shall not touch any hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary until the days of her purification are fulfilled.

Okay, seven days in the beginning then thirty-three days – together, how many? Forty days. So, Scripture says, "Forty days later," she's going to the temple with Jesus. But what does the law say?

Leviticus 12:6

⁶ 'When the days of her purification are fulfilled, whether for a son or a daughter, she shall bring to the priest a lamb of the first year as a burnt offering, and a young pigeon or a turtledove as a sin offering, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting.

What are you supposed to bring? One lamb, one pigeon. But what did we read in *Matthew*? Now, go to *verse 8,*

Leviticus 12:8

⁸ 'And if she is not able to bring a lamb, then she may bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons; one as a burnt offering and the other as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement for her, and she will be clean.'"

Remember, God's heart is always for the poor. He knew that most of the poor people could not afford a lamb. So, He said, "If you cannot afford a lamb, you can bring two doves." Shall we go to *Luke 2:24*?

Luke 2:24

²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, "A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

How is Mary going? With two? Now you tell me, are Joseph and Mary poor or rich? They are so poor, they cannot even have a lamb. Now let me ask you this question: When you see the nativity scenes, what do you see the shepherds bringing? They bring lambs. They did not bring anything. They did not. They came empty handed because you are looking at an incredibly poor couple but are incredibly righteous couple. They will not leave the lamb in their house and go with two pigeons. That will not happen with Joseph and Mary. Then Joseph won't be called just, he'll be called a liar. So in your nativity scene, if you have a nativity scene, take your lamb off, take the wise men off. If you put the wise men, put a marker saying, "They came at least two years later." In the Eastern Orthodox Church, according to their tradition, the wise men came twelve days after Christmas. So January 6th is a festival for them, which you will see in the Orthodox Churches even in Hyderabad, St. Andrews Church over there, which is called Epiphany. Epiphany means when Jesus was presented to the Gentiles. According to them, the Magi, reached Bethlehem, twelve days after Christmas. Question true or false? According to Scripture, false. How do you know? Turn to *Matthew 2*, when the Magi comes and *verse 11,*

Matthew 2:11

¹¹ And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Aiyo, you should see on TV, preachers when they reach this portion, when they come to *bungaram* (gold), they start jumping, "Bungaram, bungaram. Jesus had so much Bungaram." These are not gold bars, okay? These are gold coins. What are they going to do with bars? Let me ask you this question: would God call a man righteous and a woman blessed and they hide that gold and go forty days later as poor? Then, their names should not be Joseph and Mary; it should be Ananias and Sapphira. Because you don't even need one gold coin to buy a lamb. We are talking about two thousand years earlier. Are you seeing the picture? Much of our Christmas stories have got nothing to do with the Bible. No, brothers, the Magi came; the wise men came much later. They came to a house; not to a stable. They did not come to a Baby; they came to a

young Child. And when Herod hears that the wise men never came back to him, *verse 16*, you know what he says?

Matthew 2:16

¹⁶ Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men.

Did you see? He had asked them, "When did you see the stars?" They said, "Around two years back." There reached Jerusalem, probably, two years later. And they came and asked, "Where is He born, King of Jews?" And we'll look at it in the afternoon. When Herod found that these people never came back, he said, "All around Bethlehem, every boy under two, kill them." Now, we will look at the previous *verses 13 to 15*, you can't kill Jesus.

Matthew 2:13-15

***¹³ Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him." ¹⁴ When he arose, he took the young Child (Did you see? Three times it is mentioned, 'young child.')* and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, ¹⁵ and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt I called My Son."**

Do you like our God's ways? How old is Jesus? Two years. Where are they running? Running to Egypt. Do you know how long they were in Egypt? We don't know. May be up to six years. Jesus must have been eight years or more when He came out of Egypt. How do we know? Because we know when Herod died. It's there in history. Now, do you know why God gave them gold? "You need to live with My Son in Egypt for six or seven years. You need provision. Here is My provision brought to you from Persia. Put at your feet. Go with My Son. Take and go." Where God leads, He provides.

He had led Israel into Egypt, preserved Israel in Egypt. In the Old Testament, Israel is called God's first-born Son. Out of Egypt, Israel is called out. Israel is just a type of Jesus Christ and Jesus also will go into Egypt. Out of Egypt, Jesus will be called. You see so many things in the Bible are hidden. The problem is – instead of talking about God's provision and the ways He provides, we talk about prosperity. God's ways, we will never understand but He will always provide and we have to be content with His provision. Handpicked parents of Jesus, extremely poor. When He is born, no room in the inn, wrapped in rags. Time for purification; not even a lamb, two doves. "Flee to Egypt." Are you getting God's ways? That's how He lived. His trust was in His Father's provision and He is teaching us, "Put your trust only in My Father. Wherever My Father leads, there will be always provision."

One day, He had illustrated a point and He said, "Can you give Me a coin?" Then, He says, "Whose face is this on the coin?" And they say, "Caesar's." But do you know the point? When He had to use a coin, He did not have a coin, He had to borrow a coin. Yet, He never lacked. When He had to pay taxes, He said, "Peter, I don't have but Father says, 'A fish has a coin enough for both of us'." When He had to feed five thousand plus people, He said, "Can you give Me a *dabba* (tiffin)?" On His last journey to the Cross, Calvary, He borrowed the strength of another man. And when He died, He was buried in another man's grave. Which God are we preaching about? A God, to whom the least, the lowest can approach without fear, "You can identify with Me," Jesus says. "You can come to Me," Jesus says. All of us are on a journey. Remember, we are all on a journey. But remember the One Who took the journey before us. He's forty days old; His father is not mentioned but I believe Joseph is there; His parents are taking Him to the temple. This is the greatest day in the temple's history.

Over a thousand years earlier when Solomon had dedicated the first temple, the manifest glory of God had come. This is the temple Herod built. It's not still finished but it will continue for years. But today is going to be the greatest day in the history of the temple because, God in the flesh, is going to enter into that temple. There are two scenes – scene on earth and scene from above. Angels must all be watching to see what will happen. Scene from below, we know. How do we know? Because Scripture describes, "It is a marketplace." Everybody is buying and selling. The temple of God has become a den of thieves. They are haggling, "Two doves, two doves, one lamb, one lamb, everybody come here, come here!" It's a market place. That is where Mary enters. We don't know; Scripture is silent. Maybe Joseph went and haggled with the little coins and got two doves. Mary's holding Jesus and there, all these lines for sacrifices. Levites and priests, all busy. Bulls being taken, goats being taken, lambs being taken; then, the poor standing with doves. In that line, stands this lady with the

Baby. And into that picture enters a Man.

Luke 2:25-26

²⁵ 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.

It's interesting. I was hearing this early in the morning today. I was making my breakfast and heard this and God said, "There are five things here." If you have these five things, you will know when I am coming. Simeon was just. *Neetimantadu* (just). Righteousness is towards people. In all His ways towards us, God is righteous; He is just. There are a lot of people in this world who are just. That's not enough. Simeon is not only just; he is devout. Devotion is towards God. He is just with people, devout with God. Not only that, he is waiting for the Messiah. Not only is he waiting for the Messiah, the Spirit of God is upon him. There is an anointing that is working on his life but not only that, the Holy Spirit about his future has revealed it to him.

A lot of people upon whom the Holy Spirit is but if you listen to what they are preaching, you will know it has not been revealed to them when He is coming. These five things; why is this important? Because when Jesus came the first time, only three people recognized the Messiah. Only to three people was the Messiah pointed out by God. One was an old man called Simeon; another was an old lady called Anna and the third was John, the Baptist, who will point out, "Behold, the Lamb of God." Three people to whom God reveals the Messiah before the Messiah has ever spoken one word to them. Before Peter knows this, "You are Christ," he has walked with Jesus for years. Simeon, Anna and John – these three are the only ones. You study these three people's lives. What is given? You will see, they all had the same life. All these three were absolutely separated from the world and separated unto God. So, when the Messiah came, God said, "That's the Messiah." He was just, and he was devout and he was waiting. What are we waiting for?

This one line about this one man. He will come; he will not come back again in the Bible. He was waiting; we are all waiting but are we all waiting for the same thing? What are we waiting for? Scripture says, "*It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit, that he will not see death until he had seen the Lord's Christ.*" The Lord's coming is so close. By now, we should hear from God either, "You will die before I come," or "You will see Me coming." We should be hearing by now. If the Holy Spirit can speak to an Old Covenant man called Simeon, why can't He speak to us? "*The Holy Spirit had revealed.*" When? We don't know. Must have been many years ago. How long did he wait? What did he wait for? Do you know what he is looking for? He comes every morning to the temple, he is looking through the crowds. "Is it that Baby? Is it that little Boy? Is it that young Man?" What are you looking for? Do you know what to look for? He also doesn't know, but Scripture says, "*He's been waiting.*" And God has told, "You will not die before you see."

Where can you see? Where can you wait? You can't wait anywhere. There is only one place where you can wait. In the temple. Why? Because when the canon closed, in the *Book of Malachi*, it is written, "*Suddenly, He will come into His house.*" That is what he is waiting for. "*Suddenly, He will come.*" I cannot miss it. I need to be there and I know I will see, because He has promised. Just because He has promised, I cannot be lazy. There is God's promise and there is my obedience. If I have believed in God's promise, it will show in my obedience. "*And the Lord will come suddenly into His temple.*" When the Lord comes, we will not know. The same Holy Spirit has to point Him out to us. If you see in *Malachi 3:1*,

Malachi 3:1

¹ "Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," Says the LORD of hosts.

In verse 27,

Luke 2:27

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,

This is where God looks at our faithfulness. He must have been there at the temple everyday. That day, when Jesus came, he was not there. I don't know where Simeon was. Wherever he was in Jerusalem, whether he went shopping or nothing, we don't know. The Holy Spirit said, "Leave, run. Run, the King has come to the temple." Must have been a sight, the old man rushing. How did he come? By the Spirit, the Spirit is saying, "Go, the King has come into the temple." He enters the temple. On the other side, the parents enter with the child. And he came there.

I told my Church this – Simeon is a simple, old, poor man. Joseph and Mary are a very poor couple. Let me ask you this question: if Joseph and Mary were from a very rich family, coming into the temple with all their servants, when this old, poor, dirty man comes running, will they give the Baby into his hands? Do we understand God's ways? It's a poor couple, simple couple. This old man comes, "Can I have that Baby?" And he took Him in his arms. Mary must have looked and said, "Okay, have," and blessed God. I was telling my Church this, "All his life, he must have lifted his hands and blessed God," and today, he was lifting his head to bless God. And the Holy Spirit told him, "Today, you can look down. You can bless God. You are holding Him in your hands." Imagine his joy. This is what he was waiting for all his life. Can you believe his joy? He took Him up in his hands and he blessed God and said, "Lord, now, you are letting your servant depart in peace according to your Word. For my eyes have seen Your salvation."

You see God is still faithful to those who are waiting for Him. He can come to a temple, reveal Himself to two people and go back, without touching anyone. And the rituals are still continuing and everything that is happening is about Him but they have no clue, He is there in our midst. Just two people. One's age is given, eighty-four years old. And *verse 38* will describe her,

Luke 2-38

³⁸ ***And coming in that instant (Do you see, timing of God?) she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.***

Two people who were waiting; both were out, both came in at that same time. Why? Because there are so many priests. The doves are taken, the blood is taken, sprinkled, "You can go," that's all. It's like in the Catholic Church and all, "Go, go, go." That's all! It's become religion now. It should have taken five minutes. If you are five minutes late, Joseph and Mary are gone. And here is an old man and an old woman running. Joseph and Mary come, coming in that instant, she sees Simeon holding the Baby, she gave thanks to the Lord and spoke of Him to all those who look for redemption in Jerusalem. The Lord came into His temple, only two. To Simeon, He had told, "You will not die until your eyes have seen My salvation." As time goes by, we need to be very clear about this. If you look to the first letter written by Paul.

1 Thessalonians 4:15

¹⁵ ***For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.***

Here what Paul is saying when He is writing his first letter is that, "We say it to you by the Word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain." When he's starting, he still thinks he will be alive when Jesus comes. But at the end of his life, in his last letter, *2 Timothy 4:6*, he says,

2 Timothy 4:6

⁶ ***For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand.***

As he grows older, the Lord tells him, "Paul, you won't see Me coming," He said, "You will come to Me." Two witnesses in the Old Testament – Simeon and Anna – waiting for the Lord. They both had a personal revelation from the Holy Spirit. And there is Anna, eighty-four years old; *verse 36-38* will talk about her.

Luke 2:36-38

³⁶ ***Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity;*** ³⁷ ***and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.*** ³⁸ ***And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.***

Eighty-four years old. Those days, women got married very early and she's been a widow at least for sixty years. Scripture says, "Served God with fasting." Fasting is a conscious separation from everything that feeds your flesh. It's not just food. If you are used to the TV, you will miss the Lord's coming. Whatever is feeding your flesh, I am telling you, your spiritual eyes will become dull. Do you realize you have become really good in one year but how you struggle? I saw when worship was going on, few people were in nice *nidra* (sleep). Fan is there; music is there; sleep is there. When the Word is being preached, you will see, some people will enjoy and sleep. Let's leave the children sitting over here; remember, we are Pastors.

Do you see as Pastors, you actually struggle to work or listen to the Word for five hours, six hours everyday? You really struggle? Do you see we struggle with the things of God? Tell me, how many of you have ever fallen asleep in a theatre? Anybody? Even when the titles are going on, still sitting like this. Do we realize how strong our flesh is? We need to be honest with God, "Lord, we struggle with things of the flesh." God says, "Fast." He says, "Get away from those things." For some people like me, food doesn't make any difference. So, each one will have something from which you need to fast. Each one's struggle may be something else. Some Pastors, God will struggle to make them sit down. They can go all around in Andhra in one day. If God will say, "Sit down," they will run faster. And they think they are serving God.

We need to know what we need to fast from. Fasting continuously, there is a separation. Therefore, she knew when the Lord was coming. If I don't fast from the world, how will I know He's coming? Some people have still haven't read through their Bible but they finished today's newspaper, cover to cover, including advertisement. It is not that the people don't have the discipline; discipline is in the wrong things. Some people have a discipline of sleep; they can sleep for twelve hours. They can sleep. Others don't listen; Pastors can eat. Boy! I get shocked when I see Pastors eating. One turn, second turn, third turn; then, for the sweet – first turn, second turn, third turn. How people can eat! Honestly, we don't eat like that. We have to cut these things down. I always tell Pastors, "You want to fast? Go read *Isaiah 58*. Mark it in your Bibles." *Isaiah 58* will tell you what is the fasting that pleases God.

Simeon and Anna were separated from God and were in the temple. You and I can't be in the temple. But Scripture says, "*We are the temple*." They were separated to God because God was found in His temple. Question is: today, by our fasting and separation, are we the temple that is separated to God? Look about one line written about the third person that recognized Jesus. *Luke 1:80*, only one verse about his first thirty years of life.

Luke 1:80

⁸⁰ ***So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel.***

Aranyamalu (in the desert). Who's this? Where was he? In the desert. He was not anywhere in Israel. He was in the desert, separated to God. Then, he came out of the desert and the Holy Spirit said, "That's the Messiah," and he said, "That's the Messiah." When you are separated, it is easy for God to speak to you. We are in the world. We are not of the world. We use the things of the world. We will not allow anything of the world to bind us; we are bound only to His Spirit. Just three people, remember, in the Old Covenant, just three people recognized His coming and He had said, "*In the mouth of two or three witnesses, everything shall be established.*" Three witnesses He had. When Jesus asked His disciples this question, "*When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?*"

Through the *Book of Revelation*, Scripture warns us, "*All those who have ears, let them hear what the Holy Spirit has to say.*" How did Anna and Simeon come into the temple, exactly at that moment? The Holy Spirit told them, "The King has come into His temple." What is the Holy Spirit telling us? There is a principle in the Bible, it is found in the *Book of Amos*. It is found in *Amos 3:3* and *3:7*,

Amos 3:3,7

³ ***Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?***

⁷ ***Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, Unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.***

Are you seeing the picture? First, you and I need to learn to walk with God and if we learn to walk with God, God says, in

verse 7,

⁷ Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, Unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.

Look at verse 6,

Amos 3:6

⁶ If a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people be afraid? If there is calamity in a city, will not the LORD have done it?

Let me ask you this question; we saw terrible, terrible floods in Chennai. How many servants of God in Chennai warned the people? Why didn't they warn? Jesus wept over Jerusalem. He said, "*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how I long to gather you under My wings, but you miss the hour of your Lord's visitation.*" Forty years later, General Titus will come; Jerusalem will be under siege; Jerusalem will be destroyed; the temple will be burned down; hundreds and thousands of Jews will be killed; a million Jews will be taken to Rome as slaves. Secular history says that the prices of slaves fell so much that there was over supply of slaves in the market.

Yet, do you know what Josephus writes in his history? Before the Roman army came, prophets arose in the Church and told the Christians, "Flee Jerusalem." Church fled Jerusalem. They were not taken as slaves because God says, "I will speak if you choose to walk with Me." Simeon and Anna, in their old age chose to walk with God. You can walk with God only with much fasting and prayers because if you are not separated from the world, you cannot be separated with the Word. Therefore, when the Messiah came, though He was just a forty days old Baby, the Holy Spirit could direct both of them straight to the Baby and says, "That is the Messiah." Simeon will take the Baby in his arms and he will sing the greatest song for all of us. Do you know what Simeon says and we'll go for lunch after that.

Luke 2:29-32

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."

Anya, anya jannaloku (Gentiles). He is the first one to say the Gospel is for the Gentiles. You don't see it in Mary's song' you don't see it in Zechariah's song. The angels only say, "*Good will and peace on all earth.*" Out of the lips of that old man, he will hold that Baby and he says, "He is a light of revelation to the Gentiles." And here are you and me, sitting in the house of God, prophesied through Simeon.

So, it doesn't matter how old you are today. Simeon and Anna were very old. They still had a great work of God left in their lives. It comes from being separated to God. Let us put away all these Christmas images we got from other places. Actual picture of Christmas – how did He come? When He became a man, what did He choose? How did He make Himself of no reputation? See, let the world be whatever they want but we are His servants; we are called by His name. We need to be careful how we present this Savior to the world. Don't present Jesus as Somebody He was not in Scripture. As we break for lunch, let's look to the Lord.

Closing Prayer:

Father, we come to You. For Your love towards us, You couldn't go any lower than that. When You picked parents for Your Son, You picked two little people. Little in the eyes of the world. You picked a little town, a little stable and that's where Your Son was born. And it was announced first, to a set of little people. Our God humbled Himself to the lowest – from birth to death – so that no one would fear to approach You. We come to You, this afternoon. We thank You, Father. We thank You, Father. Your ways are not our ways; Your thoughts are not our thoughts but Your ways are always right. Where You lead, You provide. Help us to be content with Your provision. As Your servants go for lunch, we bless it. We pray it will be enough for everyone, Lord. Help us to be grateful and thankful for all that You give us. Thank You, Father. For in Jesus' Name we pray, Amen.