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President and Publisher: Dr. T. D. Worthington
Editor: Tiffany W. Johnson
Advertising Director: Ashley W. Lovett
Contributors: Tiffany Johnson
and Sherry Worthington
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JESUS OF NAZARETH

I guess I married a city girl. Compared to where I grew up, my wife was raised in a metropolis. You see, I grew up in Maury, North Carolina. There wasn't much to my town when I was a kid; there is even less to it now. They closed the schools. They closed the sewing plant. They also closed the service stations, the grocery stores, the ball field, and the soda shop. I think the barber shop and beauty shops are gone also. For me it was a perfect place to grow up, but for most outsiders, it was nothing—or maybe even less than nothing. Did you grow up in a place outsiders might call “*Nowhere*”?

Jesus grew up in “*Nowhere*” also. Did you know that the Old Testament never even mentions Nazareth? Think of all the genealogies and historical accounts in the Old Testament, and you will

often find a lot of attention paid to land, geography, and places. Yet, you will not find one single mention of Nazareth. This small speck on the map was an uncelebrated, forgotten town, off the beaten path, even for Galilee. When guileless Nathanael questioned a friend about Jesus, he expressed the common Jewish sentiment in the first century (***John 1:46***): “*Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?*”

Yet here in this sleepy town is where our Lord's earthly father and mother began their story. They were Nazarenes (*not Nazarites*). And it was only a matter of time before it would be the moniker that the enemies of our Lord, and a host of demons would use to throw mud on His credibility.

His parents came to Bethlehem as census travelers. He was born in

noble Bethlehem, but this is not where they would stay. Mary and Joseph returned to their hometown (***Matthew 2:23***). And after they took their Child up to Jerusalem to dedicate Him, “*they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth*” (***Luke 2:39***).

We also see that after His memorable visit to the temple at age 12, Luke tells us Jesus “*went down from Jerusalem*” with His parents. Indeed, He did. To leave Jerusalem was to “*go down*”—not always geographically, but always socially. And yet, as a glimpse into the self-emptying pattern of His incarnation, the Son of God “*went down with them, and came to Nazareth*” (***Luke 2:51***).

Outside the New Testament references, we know very little, if anything reliable, about ancient

Nazareth, simply because it was so obscure. First-century historians didn't know or speak much about it, at least not in prominent enough publications to be preserved. Still, in God's wise plan for His Son, a big part of His life of humility, and submission to His parents, was leaving the big-city temple, and **"going down"** to small-town Nazareth. It was in Nazareth where He was to live thirty years in obscurity. Here He would remain until John the Baptist's arrest (*Matthew 4:13*). And Nazareth not only meant a more backwater life than **"up"** in Jerusalem, but **"Nazarene"** would be a stigma He would carry the rest of His life.

You see, among the Jews, Nazareth's reputation was poor enough, but outside Israel, the town wasn't even known. Which is why each of the Gospel writers had to explain what Nazareth was — a town in Galilee — when they first mentioned it (*Matthew 2:23; Mark 1:9; Luke 1:26*).

Today we sing about the little town of Bethlehem, but Bethlehem, humble as it was compared to Jerusalem, had a name that dwarfed Nazareth's. Bethlehem was a city with a history. It was known far and wide as **"the city of David."** And Nazareth? Well, there just isn't much to be said.

During his earthly life, so far as we know, Jesus never self-identified as **"Jesus of Nazareth."** Only rarely did His followers call him that. Typically, it was crowds unfamiliar with Him, or His enemies: demons, false witnesses, and the soldiers who came with the traitor to arrest Him. And while many despised

Him for his hometown, even His fellow Nazarenes soon rejected Him, drove Him out of town, and threatened to throw Him off the cliff (*Luke 4:28–30*).

Wherever we find His name on the lips of foes who want to give it a derogatory spin, expect them to call Him **"Jesus of Nazareth."** And if Nathanael's comment, and the venom of demons and detractors, had not been enough, Pilate inscribed it on the instrument of his torture: **"Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews"** (*John 19:19*). He humbled Himself to the point of death, even death on a cross, and even being called a Nazarene.

But Nazareth's story did not end in dishonor. Our Father saw fit not only to redeem a fallen race, but also to redeem a stigmatized town,

when He raised the Nazarene from the dead. Now the risen Christ is indeed **"Jesus of Nazareth,"** not in shame but unparalleled glory.

First, it came from the angel at the tomb: **"Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here:"** (*Mark 16:6*). For more than three decades, **"Nazarene"** had been a bitter foretaste of His coming crucifixion. Now the tables have turned. Now it tastes of sweet glory.

Soon Peter made it clear, the crucified, risen Lord of the universe was none other than **"Jesus of Nazareth"** (*Acts 2:22*). Peter healed a lame man **"in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth"** (*Acts 3:6*) and declared that name to all who would listen (*Acts 4:10*). Even





in Caesarea he came preaching to the Gentiles of God’s anointing on **“Jesus of Nazareth” (Acts 10:38).**

Then came the revelation to Paul of Tarsus, who would admit, **“I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth” (Acts 26:9).** Here even Jesus Himself, in the only record we have of Him self-identifying with Nazareth, took up the newly honorific title when He appeared on the Damascus Road. **“I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutist” (Acts 22:8).**

So, God Himself grew up in a forgotten town in Galilee. He came down from Jerusalem, and went down in self-humbling, and down into the tomb, and then took Nazareth up with Him in His triumph.

Now, for the question; how many of us today, in our foolish immaturity, harbor a kind of mild contempt for our Nazareths. It may be our

hometown, it may be our social standing when we were kids, it may be our parents or our questionable family heritage, perhaps it is the way we were treated. Sometimes we even rejoice that we have ascended to heights greater than our modest origins? I am not saying that is always bad. I am just asking you to consider just what God might have been doing behind the scenes when we were growing up in our Nazareth. Consider how our Lord might have been redeeming the days we spent in Nazareth, only now to reveal how He used them for our good and for His glory. You may weep over the wasted years, but perhaps they were not wasted at all.

How remarkable that our Lord, being fully God and perfect man, didn’t make for the big city the first chance He got, or insist He dwell where all the action was. Rather, He gave nearly the entirety of His life and public ministry not grasping for Jerusalem, but humbling Himself

in Galilee. Dwelling in a man-forsaken town called Nazareth.

The answer to Nathanael’s question is an emphatic yes. And not only can something good come from Nazareth, but the greatest good can come from Nazareth. And because our God loves to produce His best in the places we least expect, perhaps we shouldn’t be so surprised when He makes the forgotten places, maybe even the shameful places, in our stories into His chosen channels of our greatest good.

Merry Christmas!

You can read many of Dr. Worthington’s PathPointe articles at: www.pathpointemagazine.org.

Additional audio sermons are available on the PathLight Podcast.



Dr. Worthington has been in the ministry for over forty five years and serves as President of Pathway Ministries and Christian Bible College.



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Making Memories

So many of us have fond memories of Christmases past; Mom baking goodies in the kitchen, dad untangling lights for the freshly cut Christmas tree, shaking wrapped presents to guess what's inside, family getting together, and school plays. Such great times and wonderful memories!

Others, however, may not have those same golden recollections. Maybe your best remembrance of Christmas was in a hospital room with a sick parent, homeless, hiding from an abusive parent or spouse,

in and out of foster homes, without decorations or presents, or just plain lonely.

We all have memories, good and bad. We also all have the opportunity to make new memories, not only for ourselves, but for those around us too.

At *GoMix Christian Radio*, we sincerely hope you can make some great, Christ-centered memories this Christmas season. Take time to celebrate and decorate. Enjoy those around you and make your time together special. Dance to your favorite Christmas songs with your children and grandchildren (making great memories for them!). Eat an extra cookie... or two! Be silly. Be happy. Most importantly, be thankful for the Gift of Jesus Christ. Let that thankfulness shine through to others.

Remember, it doesn't cost a dime to be an encouragement to those around you. For most of us, the best Christmas memories have nothing to do with the price of a gift, the cleanliness of a house, or the size of a tree.

Have a great Christmas!
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Christmas Journeys

The frankincense and myrrh mingle heavy fragrances to fill the room as one by one the boxes are opened, including a gift of gold. The wise men had traveled far to visit the Christ child.

We, too, travel at Christmas, visiting family and friends. Often, we can travel without leaving home. In our memories, we go back home and revisit with loved ones who have gone on to eternity. In our thoughts, we visit with friends and relatives who may be miles and miles away. I enjoy traveling back to ride in dad's old pick-up truck and warm my hands by grandpa's old coal fireplace. Do I taste it? The long-lost flavor of grandma's Christmas cookies? Do I catch the aroma of a freshly cut pine or cedar thrown in the back of dad's old truck or strapped to the roof of the car? ***Oh! How I love to travel at Christmas time!***

I revisit memories of each of our children when they were young. I don't need a ticket or a passport. All I need is a song, an old, crumpled picture, a Christmas movie, or just a moment of quiet. Oh, how I would travel; time and distance being no hinderance. These were places and times I wanted to return to — places where there was so much love, captured briefly and vividly, from memories long ago and far away.

Perhaps we should all spend some time traveling this season and revisit those nostalgic moments from long ago. We might even find it uplifting. In fact, in my memories, I have discovered there were no bad Christmases. At least I don't remember any. Holidays that were blighted by difficult circumstances or traumatic times have mysteriously disappeared. What I found was a bunch of tug-at-the-heart memories of

perfect togetherness, enveloping love, immortalized fun, thrilling gifts, meticulously prepared feasts, and endearingly decorated places. All the bad days have been distilled to a kind of purity, innocence and joy, far from today's troubles and ugliness. A place evil can never reach.

Some may say that Christmas memories are hard on you. I can respect that. But I don't think nostalgia necessarily has to be a lonely emotional journey. It can be a positive and redeeming passage through time. At the end of this nostalgic trip, we may find the true meaning of Christmas. Christmas memories are images moving like a carousel, a time machine: They let us travel the way a child travels, round and round, and back home again, to a place we know we are loved.

I always enjoy my Christmas journeys, often taken from the comfort of my recliner. Yet, just like the wisemen, the most important journey we make these hectic holidays is to draw nigh to Jesus himself with the gift of our hearts.

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The Gift of a Smile

Mrs. Sherry Worthington

When I was a little girl, one of my favorite choruses was “*You Can Smile*”. I don’t know how many of you have heard the little chorus; and since I can’t sing it to you, for which I know you are thankful, I will share the words.

*You can smile,
When you can’t say a word,
You can smile.
When you cannot be heard,
You can smile.
When it’s cloudy or fair,
You can smile anytime, anywhere.*

The best part of singing this chorus was when we sang it the second time through. We had to leave out the word smile and do as the song says, smile. We always had the cheesiest grins when we would sing it. All of us would get so tickled. What made

it even better was when my dad would sing it with me. He would make the goofiest grin possible. I couldn’t help but laugh.

The song is a cute kid’s song, but it has a lot of truth in it. What is one of the nicest gifts we can give someone? It does *not* cost us a cent to give a cheerful countenance. Laughter has been proven to be like medicine. When people who are sick watch comedy, they feel better. I don’t know if present-day comedy would work, but the old-fashioned kind really did the trick. Don’t you feel better after being around laughter? What happens when someone starts to laugh? I have caught myself laughing just because someone else is laughing. Laughter is contagious. I know of a few people who always appear to be

in good cheer. In fact, if they are not grinning, I grow concerned that something is wrong. I would love to have that kind of testimony.

We might ask ourselves a question. Do we think that since they smile all the time, they never have problems? Not on your life! They just have their problems in perspective. They have looked at the blessings God has given them and realized that their blessings far outweigh their problems. If any of us sat down and took the time to list all of our blessings and our problems, our blessings would far outnumber our problems. Some people in this world have very serious problems. Many of those people still remain cheerful.

A dear friend of mine went to Heaven several years ago. When I was visiting her in the hospital, the nurse came in to refill her morphine. My friend was dying from cancer and was in intense pain, but she met him with great cheer and a smile. She even joked with him and was very pleasant. Wow! How could she do that? I wonder if the nurse could tell she was a Christian. I am confident that he at least wondered how she could be so pleasant, especially when she had every right to complain. I have been to the hospital with my parents, and the nurses take a lot of abuse. Some of the nurses were near to tears because of the hatefulness of some of their patients. Yet, this woman who was near death and was suffering in tremendous pain had a smile and kind words for this nurse. My friend's Bible sat on the little table by her bed. We never know what kind of message we will send. I am confident she sent one that our Lord would be proud of. She was a beautiful testimony to this young man of how a Christian should face difficulties. I sat across from this dear friend and marveled at the joyfulness of her spirit.

She lit up the room. I came in to cheer her up, but she encouraged me tremendously. Plus, I left that day under deep conviction. My problems seemed awfully small.

Why are we, as Christians, downtrodden and complaining? God has given us so much. A simple smile and a pleasant demeanor is a great gift. Is it too much to ask? People around us have always had problems, but in our current society, the problems are magnified. The least we can do is give them a smile.

Christmas time is here! We should make it our project to spread cheer and give as many smiles as we can. A smile is not any trouble. It doesn't even have to be wrapped, unless it is in kind words. I want to give everyone a smile for Christmas and all throughout the year. We can give a smile to the clerk at the store who has had a bad day. We don't have to be a grouch and complain the whole time we are waiting in line. When we are at work and a coworker says something hurtful, we don't have to snap back or get hot and bothered. Remember who we

are in Christ, smile on the inside, and let it flow to the outside.

When problems hit us one right after another, keep in mind that our Lord created the universe and with Him, we can handle it all. Paul reminds us,

"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

Philippians 4:13

Remember that when we feel we have nothing left to give, we can always give a smile.

You can smile. When you can't say a word, you can smile. When you cannot be heard, you can smile. When it's cloudy or fair, you can smile anytime, anywhere.

Merry Christmas!



Mrs. Worthington has five children and twelve grandchildren. She serves as Principal of Pathway Christian Academy in Goldsboro.

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Ponderings

Most families have a few traditions that they enjoy during the Christmas season. Decorating, opening gifts, building gingerbread houses, and baking cookies; each of those traditions can be a lot of fun.

In Luke Chapter 2, we're given a glimpse of some of the key elements of God's redemptive plan for humanity. In this passage, we see the fulfillment of ancient prophecies, confirmation of God's hand at work through divinely orchestrated signs, the sovereign oversight God has over humanity, and the incarnation of the Son of God in the birth of Jesus Christ.

As the Old Testament Scriptures had promised, Jesus, the Messiah came in the lineage of David and was miraculously born of a virgin. His birth was heralded by angels and marveled over by simple shepherds. His earthly parents were amazed at what God was doing in their midst, and they were faithful to obey His leading during this season of their lives. I truly wish we could have heard some

of their conversations during the months leading to Christ's birth and the months immediately after it.

For some people, Christmas is an over-the-top carnival-like extravaganza filled with lights, glitter, noise, and rushing around. Some of that can certainly be fun, but I have to admit that the simplicity of what I see in the biblical account of Christ's birth ministers to me in a way that ribbons, garland, and all the other festivities of the season never could.

When I read the account we're given in Luke 2, I see a young family that's just starting out, and they're doing their best to comply with the foolish regulations of their government, even though they're moments away from having a child.

I see a young couple that doesn't have the prominence, money, or connections to make it possible for them to enjoy posh accommodations while they were in Bethlehem. Instead, they were forced by necessity to sleep with the animals and give birth in a stable.

Next, I see the shepherds trying their best to do their job, working the graveyard shift late into the night. Their parents most likely didn't brag to other parents about what their sons were doing, and their culture sometimes treated them like second-class citizens. Their task was often thought of as unappreciated, unappealing, and routine, but they were faithful to accomplish it just the same.

And so it was, to this young couple camping outside, and these few

unappreciated shepherds who didn't have the luxury of being distracted by the finer things in this world, that God miraculously spoke to that evening. In some ways, I can't help but wonder if they were in the perfect position to actually listen to what He was saying. These are the humble people who witnessed the birth of Christ.

As Christ was born and the shepherds came to visit, we're told that Mary treasured what was taking place. She treasured this miraculous birth. She treasured this enthusiastic visit from the shepherds. She treasured their retelling of what the angels had told them. This whole experience was an amazing blessing to all humanity, and Mary couldn't help but ponder what the Lord was doing and why He had chosen her and her husband to be part of this miraculous event.

We also have the privilege to treasure and ponder these things as well. Have you ever taken the time to truly ponder what God is doing in your life?

So let me leave you with this marvelous truth that I hope will remind you of the peace Christ brings to the heart of anyone who will trust Him and welcome Him to be the Lord of their life.

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Matthew 11:28-30

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And Finally...



My Favorite Christmas Memory...

My favorite Christmas memory was hanging the first baby picture of my first child on our tree. Years ago, my mother-in-law made a Christmas ornament that had a picture of our youngest child on it. Each year, we have added a new ornament for each of our children. When they became old enough to make their own ornaments, they started adding their own unique Christmas ornaments they had made. These are precious keepsakes to us. These ornaments become more and more special as time goes by and as the children grow older.

B. G.

My favorite memory is probably seeing my mother waking up early and going to the kitchen to prepare our festive meals herself, making sure that everything we needed was purchased. When we were young, we used to decorate our Christmas tree with white cotton and candies. It was always so fun with everyone in the house singing and dancing to Christmas songs.

D. M.

We were spending the night with my grandparents one Christmas Eve when I was a child. I woke up very early in the morning that Christmas. My parents and grandmother were still asleep. My grandfather sat in the floor with me at their house and played with a racecar track set that was waiting for me under the tree. This is a great memory for me because

it's the only time I ever remember playing with my grandfather.

J. F.

One year, my mom's friend had lost her job, and they were scraping to put food on the table with no money for gifts. My mom, my brothers, and I put together a basket of gifts and food for them. We dropped it off on their porch and ran away. It was so exciting! I'm pretty sure they knew it was us, but it's still a great memory.

T. B.

“Snow Days”

We'd like your help for an upcoming edition of “And Finally...”

Write to us in 150 words or less and tell us what you and your family like to do on snow days. The deadline for submission is

December 31st, 2022.

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Merry Christmas

From Your GoMix
Family of Stations



Today's Southern Gospel



Classic Southern Gospel



Soothing Instrumentals

