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## ***Star Gazers - The Magi & The Singing Army***

### **Main Verses:**

- [Matthew 1:23](#)
- [Luke 2:7](#)
- [Luke 2:8](#)
- [Luke 2:10](#)
- [Luke 2:11](#)
- [Luke 2:12](#)
- [Luke 2:13](#)
- [Luke 2:14](#)
- [Matthew 2:1](#)
- [Matthew 2:2](#)
- [Matthew 2:11](#)
- [Isaiah 60:6](#)
- [Genesis 25:1](#)
- [Genesis 25:6](#)
- [Jeremiah 10:2](#)

**Watch on Youtube:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1gP6idJD8oA>

**Message Given:** Dec 24th 2023

### **Podcast:**

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**Teaching Length:** 56 Minutes 40 Seconds

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*Good. All right. Shabbat Shalom, everybody. So excited to be back together this week. If this is your first time visiting our church or watching services online, as we are a community of diverse families with a lot of diverse backgrounds and individuals who love the Sabbath, we find joy in the entirety of the Bible. But most of all, we're a community that seeks first and foremost to orbit the person of Jesus who we call Yeshua. So welcome to Founded in Truth Fellowship. Well, it's that time of year again, the darkest part of the year. People tend to stay inside more. You know, we're getting in kind of midwinter now. The coldest part has yet to come down here. And it's funny because every culture in the world during this season of winter has parties usually having something to do with light or lights, right? Everybody does*

it. But what else are you going to do? You know, days are getting shorter and shorter and shorter. For many people, it's the most depressing part of the year. It gets cold. People got to force themselves to be happy. They call it the holiday spirit. Maybe manic depression. I don't know, but it is the holiday spirit. And it's also the season of something called Advent. And if you're unfamiliar with some of the older Christian traditions, Advent begins a season of anticipating the coming of Christ. Very old tradition in most of the higher denominations in Christianity. And it starts somewhere around mid-November, usually. And it's a time to remind yourself to refocus, to readjust the focus and remember things like the incarnation of Yeshua in Bethlehem. to remind you that his presence is with you even now, and to remind you that Yeshua is coming back, Advent. And then, of course, in Christian tradition, it culminates Christmas Eve, and then the culmination of all is, of course, Christmas Day, right? And the older I get, the more studying Christian traditions, even though we really don't do a whole lot of Advent stuff, you know, we do most of the coming of Christ stuff that we do is for the Feast of Tabernacles, right? But I still find it beautiful when I study the history of it. And even though, like I said, we celebrate the birth of Yeshua during the Feast of Tabernacles, Sukkot. The kids have started throwing Yeshua a birthday party every year, which is something I'm super stoked to be a part of, by the way. Because it's awesome. Because the kids get excited. And it's important to remind our children as many times as we have the opportunity to do so under any circumstances... The day when the child king was born. It's an important story. Important story. Forget the date. It's an important story. So my history was not always appreciating how different denominations throughout Christian history recognize and observe different things. I can look out today and view things like Advent as beautiful because of the intentionality of it and how it builds up Christ's But that wasn't always my history. I come from a background of being involved with a very fringe denomination of Christianity. Some would even call it a cult for a time. And everything in my life and in my initial circles revolved around an attitude, a religious attitude of us versus them, us versus them. We were the righteous ones because we studied the Bible a certain way. We knew things from a certain perspective that we were the righteous ones and everyone else, eh, not quite. And not even like unbelievers and pagans, but like other Christians. We were the better Christians than everyone else because of, I've heard a couple of yes, so a couple of other people. I'm not the only one that's been through a phase like that. Okay, we're good, good. Starting to feel vulnerable. I'm like, yeah, I'm Matthew. I came out of a cult mindset. And it's so funny because we, And maybe it's human nature, but we always like to feel like we're special. It always feels nice when you feel like you're part of the inside club that has the most knowledge about something or has the clearest perspective on who God is or manipulating your own life in a way that makes you feel like God loves you more than everyone else. And that was totally something that I have a history of being involved in. a long time ago. All the other Christians out there were bad guys, and I was the only good one, and like the few people around me that we got, yeah, I was a jerk. And looking back at that time, I realized during this time where I thought I knew everything, I now realize I didn't really study the Bible. I read certain parts of the Bible. I didn't actually study it. I did like everyone else does. I go on YouTube and I found a video that spoke about a topic that I wanted to learn about. And of course the video started off with this epic cinematic music, you know, conspiracy theory stuff. And it would endorse what I wanted it to tell me, what I wanted to believe. YouTube, man, you can learn so much from YouTube. Has anyone repaired something in their house while watching a YouTube video? Yeah. Cars? Yeah, dangerous. Yeah, that's right. Yeah, that's right. You can learn how to build a house. Chicken coop, repair, toilet, do everything. Or you can fall

down a rabbit hole of misinformation and sensationalism about every topic from aliens to nothing is real and this is all a simulation. And I loved being in a place in my life during that season where I felt like I was right all the time because for me it gave me a sense of identity and satisfaction. And the easiest way to achieve that Now, the quickest way is to grab the low-hanging fruit called God spray paint, is what I call it. And that's when you take a conviction or an opinion that you have, and you just get that can of paint, and you shake it up, and you spray God all over it so that it makes it so God is endorsing your conviction or opinion. Does that make sense? Yeah. And we'll pull verses out of the Bible and we will treat them like a stretch Armstrong to connect things together that were never meant to connect. And then, of course, I would get on the Facebook and post all types of stuff until someone disagreed with me. And then I would be so arrogant and fight people online because they disagreed with me. And I'll run them through too because that's what we like to do. It empowers us, right? And then one day in my prayer life, I'd like to say it was God. Could have been spicy food. It was, and I say that with a little bit of a jest because, well, I used to, God told me this, God told me that. It's just an easy thing to throw out there when maybe God's just allowing you to have wisdom. But I had this thought. and it shook me to the core because I was reminded in the scriptures how it tells us that we're going to be judged according to everything that we said or did in life, and we're like, yeah, but I'm the righteous one, so it's not going to be a very short trial for me. And I realized in that moment that the way I had been representing God in my own image has likely pushed people away from wanting anything to do with him based on how I presented God to them. And I'm sure I got lots of sins on that piece of paper that's going to be read out in the trial, you know, how we view the judgment's going to go. That's kind of the one that scares me the most till this day. The things I would say in the name of God, the things I did in the name of God, the way I would justify hurting other people, manipulation, causing pain, arrogance, by attaching a Bible verse to the things I said as a permission slip to say them. And yeah, yeah. Because that's what it means to take the Lord's name in vain. Because you're wearing his name, right? And that caused me to make a transition in my life to get really serious about studying the scriptures. Not only that, studying history, verifying sources, nerd stuff. And that's when the story of God, the Bible, the word of God, really evolved into something that was just so beautiful and awesome in my life. Especially with the story of the nativity. The story of Yeshua's birth, right? It's recorded in two of the four gospel accounts, and they're portrayed slightly differently for obvious reasons, two different directors, right? And we know the story, and the way that Matthew and Luke tells it is just beautiful. Luke does not like to rush into the story. He starts out slow, right? He doesn't even start out with Yeshua. He's like, we're going to start out with John's parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth, a priest in the temple. and their prophetic child being the herald of the coming king. And he does this to show a very stark transition in the story where the light moves off John onto Yeshua. And so the audience, he knows his audience, they see that transition take place. Something has shifted. And in Matthew, we're introduced to Joseph. In Luke, Luke likes the ladies throughout his entire, he has a focus on the women characters, female characters, but he likes Mary, right? Matthew focuses on Joseph. But sometimes we become so familiar with stories that they lose weight. And the nativity is one of those stories, right? And it gets wrapped up in this wonderful, as far as I'm concerned, the holiday that we as Americans created, which is what we have today, Christmas and Christmas season. What we have today did not exist prior to 150 years ago. Elements of it did, but not what we have this today. But we see the nativity so many times, and it's just a big season, and it's commercialized and all this stuff, and we lose touch with what actually, well, it's just a little story where baby Jesus was

born. And we forget that, no, this is the child king. This is the child king that's about to engage in battle with evil, engage in battle with Satan, engage in battle and fight to redeem his people. For what purpose? To reconcile mankind back with God. And he shall be called. God is with us, Emmanuel. And the story occurs at a point in history where Caesar... requires a census to be taken. Everyone must go to their hometown. So Joseph packs up his pregnant wife and they go to Bethlehem. And while they're there, it became time to bury her child. And they tried to go to the Motel 6. We know the story, but there were no rooms left. So they got stuck in a barn. Have you ever heard that story and been like, no one would give their room up for a woman in labor, right? It was just, no, it was just, yeah. Sometimes we believe things or we think things because of what we've been taught. And sometimes we believe things because it's what we want to believe. But what's funny is for a while now, that story, Christian historians have shifted their view on what that story actually looks like. And it hasn't really trickled down yet, but most of modern translations have changed that verse. You will no longer see like there was no room left in the inn with things like the CSB or the Holman Bible, the NIV even. They've updated it with their last revision. There was no more room left in the guest room is what they've come to realize that Greek word means. Because the Greek word doesn't mean inn as in a hotel. It literally means like the common sleeping area in a home, in a house in Judea. And how we've discovered homes are built is they used to have one or two main sleeping areas, and then they'd have a foyer on the front or the back where you could bring in animals to keep them safe, keep them warm, whatever. And the most striking thing that we found is that they would generally dig out these stone or carve out these stone feeding troughs in the floor of these areas where the animals were brought in. The manger. That's what a manger is. A manger is a feeding trough. It's not a barn. It's just where you stick the hay. And it kind of reframes the whole story because if they were going back to their homeland where their families are from, Joseph, then why do we think that Joseph's family isn't there? Strange, right? And it never says that she had the baby. It just says she had the baby and they laid him in a manger. So could it be that Joseph was there with his family? I don't know. at their house, and there was no room in the guest room because it was packed out, so the only appropriate place to have so that they could have the area in the back. It's open, and she laid him in the feeding trough. I don't know. It kind of really shifts the whole story. Luke does not tell us where Mary gave birth to Yeshua. It doesn't say. It doesn't say it in the verse. It could have been at a hospital. Who knows? But she laid him in the feeding trough, and that's what it wants to emphasize. And then we come to the great announcement. to the shepherds out in the fields. In Luke chapter 2 verse 8, I don't think I have a slot for it, I don't know. And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, right? And an angel of the Lord appears to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, do not be afraid. The angel speaks to these shepherds and says, I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all people. Today in the town of David, a savior has been born. He gives him another title. He's the Messiah, the anointed king. Gives him another title. He's kurios, the Lord. This will be a sign to you. Here's the sign where you're gonna find the great king, the Lord, the redeemer and savior. He will be wrapped in cloths and lying in a feeding trough. Such a nice story, right? Shepherds out in the field of Bethlehem, minding their own business. I used to think that there's no way shepherds would be out in the field of Bethlehem in the middle of winter, right? Like, there's no way. I was wrong about that. Last year, we were in Bethlehem on our tour. I think it was December 28th or 29th. I tried to get our driver to pull over and get one of these Arab shepherds to take a selfie with us with like all the, right? He said no. But I tried hard. You were there. I tried. Pull

over, please. But the shepherds are there. They're very much so shepherding in the winter because that's when the deserts of Judea bloom again after the hottest months where everything's scorched. And the angel appears to them and the glory of God himself erupts around them, is what it says. And with cosmic authority, the angel speaks and he says, I bring you good news and will cause great joy for all people. Today in the town of David, the Messiah, the Savior, the Lord, you'll find him. Not in a gold-plated bassinet, but in the feeding trough. And what's neat is, we don't know, speculation. It may have been pretty common practice for the shepherds being raised poorer to have experienced something similar, being placed in a feeding trough. I mean, it works, right? I don't know. Maybe, maybe not. Matt, there's no way a parent would ever stick their kid in a feeding trough. Okay, not that long ago where y'all were stuck in some dresser drawers over the night. But okay, that's something that we used to do. Stick them in the drawer, good night. Yeah. But then my favorite part of the story, and this is the part that we gloss over after it's announced to the shepherds, right? This is happening. It says, then suddenly, as if they've been holding back and cannot stand it anymore, the great company of heavenly hosts, okay? Hosts is a military term. Heavenly hosts, so this is, the armies of heaven, right? God's army. They break through into this reality because they can't hold back anymore. Glory to God in the highest of heaven and on earth peace to all of those of which his favor rests. Peace on earth. Why? Because no matter what circumstances happen, no matter what man does, no matter what man believes, Yeshua will always be the prince of peace in any circumstance. The military of God broke forth in singing about the arrival of the child king. So good. So good. Someone once told me a long time ago, they said nowhere in the Bible, right? Nowhere in the Bible does it say to celebrate birthdays, especially Yeshua's birthday. It doesn't command celebration of birthday, birthday of Jesus. Okay, that's good. But someone needs to tell that to Michael and Gabriel and the rest of the heavenly army, the heavenly warriors of Yahweh. You guys ever have an exciting thing that you think about? Let me rephrase that. What is the most exciting thing you've ever done in your life? And if something just came to mind, it could have been something like, I don't know, skydiving. That's a fun thing to do. It could have been something that you experienced at a job or maybe an experience overseas, maybe military experience. Seeing your firstborn child or something that was exciting. And you cannot remember feelings. You cannot remember memories without feeling the feelings attached to them. So a lot of times, if you remember your most exciting thing that you ever did, you'll get a spark of joy. Sometimes a little bit of adrenaline, depending on what it was. It'll come back. Of the entirety of the existence of these eternal cosmic angels... This is the moment that they still look back on for nostalgia as the most exciting thing that they've ever experienced. This is it. The child king has finally been born and they could not hold it back. They had to break through and begin singing. That's how big of a deal this story is. And if it's not a big deal, then we've lost touch with what Luke and Matthew are trying to relay to us. If it's not a big deal, then we've lost touch for what Paul was so excited about, of who Yeshua is and what this actually means for not just Israel, but all of creation. Peace on earth, for all have the favor of God resting on them. This is the announcement of the good news has come in the form of this child king. And that gets me excited. Love it. This great thing has happened. And of course, Matthew frames a story out like a Michael Bay film. Great exciting things are going to happen. It's wonderful. And then terror and anxiety, right? Right after Yeshua is born, Matthew says the Magi come from the east. And I'm not really sure how long after his birth they came, but these Magi show up in such a display. This massive caravan comes rolling up. So much so that it gets everybody's attention. What? There was only three of them. Never says how many... Magi there were.

Could have been a hundred, could have been two, just as plural. They brought three gifts, but the Magi show up. And we know, of course, King Herod gets really nervous about this because the Magi are looking for the, hey, where's the new king that was born? Herod gets a hold of this. Where is this? This is a threat to my king. This is, what new king? I'm the only king here. And so we know what happens next. King Herod, in the name of national security, goes and kills every child in Bethlehem. But the Magi, They show up, they find this child with Mary and Joseph, and they lay this wad of cash. Here you go. Here's the gift. Here's the gold. Gold, frankincense, and myrrh. So gold and incense, right? And it even says Mary's just beside herself. What is happening? What is even happening with all of this? The Magi. The Magi were mystics, if you will. They studied the stars. They were stargazers. And many believe they came from Persia, Zoroastrianism, astrologers, that they saw a star of some kind, that's what it says. And they read the stars and the king of the Jews that's going to impact all of humanity has been born. We need to go welcome him with our gifts. But they could have also been Arabian, if you will, from the lower portion of Mesopotamia area. And what's neat about that opinion is that is the area where the seed of Abraham ended up settling. In Genesis chapter 25, we have the story of Abraham taking another wife, Keturah, and she bore to him all of these children, Medan, Midian, Sheba, grandchildren, Ephah. And it says he left everything to Isaac, his inheritance, but before, and this is a funny way of saying it, before he died, while he was still alive, right? Right? He gave a whole bunch of gifts to all of his sons of his concubines and his wife. In other words, before he had to give Isaac everything, he went ahead and loaded all of these kids, all of his other children up. And he sent them away from his son Isaac to the land of the east, the same area the Magi came from. Now, why do I bring that up? I bring that up because it's neat, because there's a prophecy in Isaiah in chapter 60, you know, the really happy chapter. At least it starts out happy, and then it gets really dark. Arise, O Lord. It's a prophecy of when darkness has covered the earth in Isaiah 60, but God has risen like the sun and caused light to cast away the darkness. So that all the nations will see it. And not only that, specifically mentioning all of these same sons of Abraham, the sons of the concubines, returning from the east and being reconciled with God as God's people. And the reason why I find this so interesting is because it says that they are bringing very specific gifts with them back from the east. It says, I don't know. I just found that neat. So the angel announces this is good news for all people. All people have access to God's favor, not based on your lineage, your heritage, your status, or your citizenship. God has an equal seat at the table with your name on it. But then the Magi show up from the east, and they bring gold and incense, possibly a fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah, and that all nations will rejoice. Even the non-Israelite offspring of Abraham are participating, so much so that that they're even participating directly or indirectly in the temple service with their flocks while they rejoice. Just adds another layer to the nativity story. This is bigger than a baby being born. A story should get us excited. But as I said before, far too many times we grow weary of it. We forget to be excited for what it means when we hear the most incredible story ever told. Instead, we move on to more sensational things, get us really going depending on the season. Political season, that's the thing that we're excited about. politics of a secular nation or will be excited or preoccupied about wars that are going on in secular nations or will be so distracted by whatever secular culture tells us to be excited about. And the Nativity story, no matter what time of year it is, it's just sometimes we think of it as so casual. It's just another lore that we've grown tired of. The mindset I used to have with people around me, we became so bitter. We wanted to be so set apart. from everyone else over the most minute things in the name of a farce sense of self-righteousness. And I used to minimize the nativity story. I

minimized it for one reason and one reason only, and that was because the rest of Christians around the world celebrated the story of Yeshua's birth. And I wanted to emphasize how different I was from them, and it's just amazing the lengths that we will go to to just feel special about for no other reason than our own. And during my time as a fundamentalist, searching for any reason to feel more special than others, I fell for a lot of lies. This is 15, 16, 17 years ago. I fell for a lot of lies, as long as they were saying what I wanted to hear, right? I accused everybody of, my big thing was I accused everybody of following man-made traditions, right? You're following all these man-made traditions. And when I myself was following all kinds of man-made traditions that more than anyone else, I just believed anything anyone would tell me. So I used to tell people that December 25th was the winter solstice, right? And that's when all these pagan religious stuff, that's where everybody believed their pagan gods were born. Therefore, to say that Jesus being born on December 25th was an abomination and idolatry. And I didn't read that in a history book, but I wanted it to be true. And it supported what I wanted to be true, therefore it was true a long time ago.

But when I actually began searching for sources to confirm what I wanted to be true, I couldn't find any. It was a very humbling experience for me. The lore and stories of most deities in the ancient world never actually documented their birth date because that's not really something they wanted to emphasize of an all-powerful God. Now, Zeus, we know is documented in his lore. He was born in the spring, right? But everyone else never mentions it. I also realized that December 25th is not the winter solstice. It's usually on the 21st. It's 21st.

And then I went to go look at the history of why December 25th was chosen to be the birthday of Jesus. I mean, let's be honest. The Bible does not clearly say when Jesus was born, right? It doesn't. I like to believe Yeshua was born during the Feast of Tabernacles. I feel like I can support that with a little bit of dancing in the Luke and Matthew accounts. But even the theory has its weak points. It just doesn't tell us. But yeah, December 25th, why it was chosen as the birthday of Jesus with Christians, it's disappointing because it's just so underwhelming. So underwhelming. During the early third century, there was an idea that a date... the date of a person's death was somehow linked to the day that they were born. It was just something that they did. It was just an idea, right? And Tertullian asserted, based on the Hebrew calendar of when Passover fell, that Yeshua died Passover on March 25th. That was the date that he chose. Not a Hebrew date. That's what he reconciled. March 25th. And because of this,

it was believed, or at least the tradition, that Yeshua was also conceived on the same calendar date with Mary. And because we all know pregnancies are exactly nine months long, then we arrive anticlimactically at December 25th, right? So it's 40 weeks, which is what? Generally about nine and a half months, something like that, give or take, right? Somewhere around that, yeah. Back in the third century, nine months, exactly. 25th of December. Here's a quote from Augustine. He says, December 25th. That's it. My sensational cult-like character trying to find something really juicy to throw at someone, I was really disappointed. But that's it. That ruined some of my ammunition back in the day. I used to thrust at people. Just made it up, 29 months. Now, after Christians had declared the tradition... of December 25th as Yeshua's birthday. About the late 4th century, the Romans established December 25th as a celebration of Sol Invictus, from my understanding, sun god. Some data suggests possibly as a response of Christian celebrations, maybe. But yeah, our elder brothers and sisters, Christian brothers and sisters, 1800 years ago, chose the date first, it seems. And that was the thing that really spiraled me out of control, if you will, studying historical sources concerning Christmas traditions and how Christmas became what it is today. And like I said, all of it is so underwhelming. Nothing exciting like I had hoped, you

know? This is the day when parents sacrifice their children to Molech in exchange for gifts.

Something that I bought into a long time ago. That's pure fabrication. It's a lie someone made up. Because we have no documentation of a deity named Molech, and we're not even sure if it was a deity. It might have been just an offering, a type of sacrifice. We don't know.

But during my journey of studying all of these things, again, for me to use as ammunition toward other people, I said, I know where I can go to find the juiciest piece of information, and that will be Christmas trees. Because that's just low-hanging fruit. Jeremiah 10 says don't have a Christmas tree, right? Right? Jeremiah 10 is mocking an idol craftsman that's forming an idol out of a chunk of wood, a block of wood, and overlaying with silver and gold. But no, it actually got into sources and what data we could find. Christmas trees. This one got me good.

I didn't like it. Christmas trees seem to be a Christian tradition invented in Germany around the 1600s, something like that. Now, you had pagans with their urologs. Christmas tree is something different. They're not even operated the same, right? So in the medieval church, I think till this day, Christmas Eve was known as the Feast of Adam and Eve. And during this time, we have some data indicates they used to have these plays, these performances where they would reminisce of the story of Adam and Eve coming up on the advent of Christ and why the world needs to be redeemed to further emphasize what grand thing took place in the nativity. And so with the story of Adam and Eve, you can't have the story of Adam and Eve without what? The tree of not living good and evil? That's not really the tree we like, right? It's the tree of life. And what better tree would symbolize the tree of life than a tree that is green forever in the middle of Europe in the middle of winter? Evergreen tree. And so, yeah, they'd use a dumb tree as a prop and hang fruit on it, and they'd call it a paradise tree if you wanted to kind of research that a little bit. Paradise tree. But Christmas was not family-friendly during this time of history, medieval stuff. It was a very adult type of, well, in the Middle Ages, the Dark Ages, I mean, what do you do? So there was a lot of revelry. There was a lot of fun, as we would call it. And of course, Uncle Bob would show up every year, and he would party too hard and ruin it for everyone. And so Adam and Eve plays kind of got pushed, just snuffed out because they were too wild. They became too wild, if you can imagine that. And so people started bringing these little trees into their homes to remember the tree of life. So

underwhelming. So underwhelming. Now, Germans also had something else called a Christmas pyramid. That's neat. You probably still see some versions of it today. It was a structure that was built. Of course, back then it was really big. And they'd have like elements of the nativity and just elements of the nativity story built into it. It wasn't an actual pyramid, like a structure that was built in tiers. You still see them today and you put candles on them, put lights and gold and stuff on them. But the ones today, I guess, have a fan at the top. You put candles under it and the heat goes and they spin the, you know what I'm talking about?

Yeah, it's a Christmas pyramid. Bigger back then, Germans, right? Yeah. Always looking to build something neat just for no reason. Why? It didn't take long for these two things to become conflated, the Christmas tree and the Christmas pyramid. No evidence anywhere that Christmas trees existed before the 17th century. No primary sources. Speculation, you know, maybe there's a connection, but as far as documentation, I felt defeated when I found that out. in my pursuit to tell all Christians, like all my friends, that they are doing evil things by celebrating the birth of Jesus on December 25th. But I knew I could get them. I knew I could get them with the big guy, right? Santa Claus. So underwhelming, isn't it? Now, I'm not a fan of modern-day invention of Santa Claus. History of Santa is actually really interesting. So the Santa we had today didn't really exist again more than... say 200 years, but really 125 years. Like we, the USA, kind of created what and who Santa is today. I say that, I say that, but



capitalism did. Coca-Cola rebranded Santa Claus. That's when he got a standardized red cape because it was Coke. It was Coca-Cola to associate this guy with a family-friendly thing so you buy the product. Consumerism, the outlandish level of we have today associated with Christmas, which I am diehard against, was propagated by department stores like Macy's. The Macy's parade, right? We're going to kick off Thanksgiving with a big parade with all of these departments. Why? Because it's spending season. It's time for you to buy things that you don't need or can't afford to make investors rich, right? St. Nicholas was a real person and he used to punch people that disagreed with him in theological debates. And He had a patron day, so the church gave him a feast today because he was a saint, St. Nicholas. And it was the day he died, December 6th. And that was his day, right? And gift-giving was associated with him on his day because he had a reputation for giving gifts to the poor. Really wasn't Christmas-oriented. December 6th, give to the poor. And no one had a problem with that except for one man. And boy, did he have a problem with it. Martin Luther. Martin Luther. the father of the Reformation. This man did not like the Catholic Church or the church at the time, the structure. You're giving too much honor to a human being, a man, a saint on this day. No, no. Have you ever liked, like, have you ever not liked someone so badly that you intentionally want to do something differently just to make yourself look better than them or minimize them or make yourself look more righteous to spite them? No? Okay. Martin Luther was, It was like, hey, why are we giving gifts on St. Nicholas Day? Because St. Nick is not the greatest gift giver of all time. Do you know who truly is the greatest gift giver? Jesus Christ. He's the ultimate gift giver. So Martin Luther, despite the church, declared that we should give gifts not on St. Nicholas Day, but on the appropriate day of the gift giver, Jesus' birthday. That's so underwhelming, right? Like not even a, that was when the shift took place. And in Germany, they went with it because, you know, they don't want to look like the Catholics. They're going to do the same thing and just move it. And the tradition came out of that called Christkind or Christkind or Christ child, German. And they had images that they painted, drawings, even little dolls that they made. of this little infant angel during this time with wings and a crown, a halo. And Martin Luther's intention was that it would be focused on symbolizing baby Jesus as the gift giver. I think that's, I think that's, I don't know why I think that's humorous. I don't know. Baby Jesus is going to come and give you presents on his birthday. Okay, cool. They went with it. Totally went with it. The Christkind evolved from symbolizing baby Jesus. It kind of morphed into this angel being. And then, of course, in the 1800s, it became a Santa's little helper thing, where the Catholic Church embraced it again, ironically, in modern depictions of the Christkind as a female angel. That's where the angel imagery of Christmas comes from. Regardless, that's how gift-giving really became associated with December 25th and Christmas, at least in larger Christendom. And I love this because... It's just like us people to try to use Jesus as a way to show that we are more righteous than other people that believe in Jesus. Maybe Jesus is the true gift giver. It was the whole point of that. It was just, I don't know. In the 1800s, two anonymous poems were written that mentioned Santa having a sleigh. That's where they began, early 1800s. Nothing before that documented. A few years later, A Night Before Christmas poem came out, and that tradition stuck. Before that, no clear association with Santa and reindeer. I say all of this for a reason, because in my history, in my life, I sought to destroy relationships in my life using misinformation about all kinds of things. And Christmas was the one that I personally used most on other people, because it's something important to other people. And just like Martin Luther, nothing fuels our far sense of self-righteousness more than taking something important from someone else and using it to make ourselves feel better about our own

insecurities and vulnerabilities. And I wish I was mature enough 15, 16, 17 years ago to admit to myself that I was using God as a weapon to tear down instead of lifting people up and actually impacting the world with the message I claim to believe. And that is the glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth, peace to those who his favor rests. And there's a lot of opinions on Christmas and I'm still a bit disgusted by on how commercialism and the pursuit of money was used to evolve it in what we have today for the sake of profiting other people. And then we're enticed to go out and spend money that we don't have to participate in the game of keeping up for the Joneses and that our own children are leveraged against us to cause guilt if we don't. I think that's awful and manipulation and evil. That's just me. If you need a reason not to celebrate Christmas, that would be the most biblical way But there's a lot of sensational YouTube videos out there that make misinformed claims. They fabricate ancient history and they spray paint God on human agendas to make Christmas to be something that it isn't. Why Christmas is the way it is today is underwhelming history. But the story behind it can never be monopolized. I celebrate the birth of Yeshua during the Feast of Tabernacles, during Sukkot. That is our tradition. We set out our nativity scene at our home during the season of Sukkot. I love that because I get to tell the story to my kids about when the child king was born. But I'm also really personally thankful that despite all of the commercialism of the Christmas season, I'm thankful for Christians and churches that also display nativity scenes and host live nativities today during this season. Even if it's not the season I think is the right season. Why? Because it's another opportunity for my kids to be exposed to the greatest story that and for them to ask about it. And I love that. And I'm not gonna use what I don't like about Christmas as an excuse for them not to hear the story again. Lot of opinions about Christmas. I have a lot of opinions about Christmas, and Easter, and the Fourth of July, if we're just being honest. And it's okay to have different opinions, right? We got three people, it's good. It's okay to have different opinions about whatever. We have people here that don't celebrate Christmas, and we have some that do, and that's okay. Because we can be diverse people that gather and share a focus on the Prince of Peace, right? And I guess the point of all of this, because we're in the middle of the season, is that whether you celebrate Christmas or not, on whatever level, I just want to encourage you today to remember the story of what it represents, truly. And not allow it to be whitewashed for whatever reason you would choose to minimize it. And be kind to people that may not share the same convictions or opinions that you do. Especially family. Because one day, either you or them are not going to be here with the other. And if you don't celebrate Christmas, it's cool. But if family that does invites you over for dinner on December 25th because they want to spend time with you on a day that's kind of special to them that they associate with family being together, why would you ever let your opinions about a date get in the way of that? We're called to be a set-apart people so that others will see the light of Yeshua. They will never see it if they never see you, or if you are only known by what you are against and not who you are for. And so shine in the darkest places and let your light burst forth so that you can be the salt of the earth. Audit yourself, audit your intentions, forgive past hurts, embrace love and mercy, and be the bringer of grace that Yeshua taught you to be today. no matter what the circumstances. And that looks different for every person and every scenario. But what a more appropriate time to do so than when the entire world, secular or not, is looking for it. Be a stargazer and be excited every single day of the year. Be excited about who was placed in the feeding trough. but now sits in might and in power and authority at the right hand of God. That's what the nativity story should impact you with. And to a world that needs it most, it's the followers of Yeshua. Despite what time of year it is, despite how big

*commercialism is, despite X, Y, Z, your calling hasn't changed. Be that ambassador. Be who you were called to be because you of the impact of what took place in Bethlehem that year. So with that, guys, I ask you to stand as we conclude services with worship. And during this time, I encourage you to sing, praise God for the mercy and grace he's bestowed on you, to meditate on how you can be that person to other people, or you can just pray. If you need prayer today, we have a prayer team that will be on either side of the stage. They can pray with you for whatever you need. Alvino Marqueno, our father, our king, father, we thank you for this opportunity. During the darkest time of the year, that we're reminded, appropriately so, that we're called to still be the light of the world. That we're called not to let anything stop us or hinder us from reaching people. That we're reminded that not even the angels could maintain their composure at the news of of this child, the Savior, the Messiah, the Lord, being born into creation. We thank you for your mercy, Father, your grace. We thank you for the Holy Spirit that you say is within us even now, that it will continue to give us wisdom, strength, boldness, and be radical in how we give grace to others. In Yeshua's name we pray. Amen.*

*Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one. Blessed is the name of His glorious kingdom for all eternity. May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up His countenance toward you and give you peace. Shabbat shalom.*

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