

“The Perfect Christmas”

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Jenna was right, it is perfect but it's almost *suspiciously* perfect, it's almost like too perfect to be true. It's almost like a story that somebody would make up in order to convince people to do things because life isn't really all that perfect. You know, actually the Christmas story doesn't begin with the angel appearing to Mary. The Christmas story begins with an angel appearing to a couple who is too old to have children to tell them they were going to finally have a child—which was kind of perfect, because in those days people thought if you didn't have children God had cursed you and God was mad at you. And you had either done something bad in a former life or you had done something bad and were just out of favor with God. And so this angel appears and says to Elizabeth and to Zechariah that *you're going to have a son. You're going to name him John and he's actually going to announce the coming of the Messiah that the Jews have waited for forever.* And so it's kind of perfect because it was foreshadowed by the fact that when Jesus grew up and was a man, part of his ministry would be to people who thought they were out of favor with God for something they had done or their parents had done and they would never ever find favor with God. So, that part of it was perfect.

Then finally the angel appears to Mary and she's a teenager, maybe fourteen years old—you probably knew that—and the angel says, *Mary, you have found favor with God. To which Mary must have thought I'm fourteen, how could I have found favor with God? I haven't even lived long enough to find favor with God.* And the angel says *it doesn't matter because God has just chosen you. He has just shown favor on you.* Which again is perfect because throughout Jesus' ministry he would go around showing favor to people who had not done anything in order to earn his favor. In fact, he would show favor to people who had done things to create a sense of displeasure between them and God. So it was like this cool foreshadowing thing. It's such a perfect story. And then maybe the best part of all is that the first group of people that find out about Jesus being born are shepherds. And we don't understand this because we don't have shepherds, but shepherds were outsiders. They were kind of outcasts in terms of the whole religious system. In their religious system you couldn't touch dead things—you couldn't handle dead things—and shepherds were always handling dead things and dealing with dead things. So they would raise the sheep and give the sheep to the good people and the good people would go have a sacrifice and get close to God. Meanwhile the shepherds were kind of the outsiders.

It would be easy to be a cynical shepherd—a skeptical shepherd—but they were certainly outside the religious system, and yet in this perfect story that's so perfect it seems like somebody just made it up, the angel appears to the shepherds—the outsiders—and says *we want you to be the first to know, you outsiders, that God has done something in the world and God is doing something incredible. And we want you to see it even though you have never been invited to anything religious because you are always ceremonially unclean because sometimes you walk in front of the sheep but sometimes you walk behind the sheep... And, we know that puts you on the outside. But we want you to be the first to know. We want to invite you into this thing that God has done.* It's just perfect because when Jesus would grow up and be a man in his ministry, he would spend so much time going to people who were