

## WELCOME

Well, Merry Christmas, church! If I haven't met you, my name is Chris Martin and I'm the Lead Pastor here at Fathom Church, and I am so glad to be with y'all.

- Hey, a big welcome to those joining us online!
- Whether you're travelling right now
- OR you're still staying at home
- OR you're just visiting with us,

we're so glad you're with us. Let us know in the chat that you're here!

Kyle's in the back, and he's watching the chat! So, let us know who you are and where you're watching from!

## INTRODUCTION: FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Well, it's Christmas Eve, and so,

- I know there are a bunch of you who aren't regulars here...
- additionally, we've had quite the influx of new people
- the last couple months.

So, I thought it'd be good if I told you a little bit about myself.

So, I did not grow up in church. Like some of you, we went to church on Christmas and Easter!

And real quick, if you're kinda a Christmas/Easter only kind person:

- first, I'm genuinely so glad you're here with us today. I just hope you feel welcomed, and that this service boosts your Christmas!
- But second: just beware...I used to be you...  
and now look at what I do.

But we never went to church on Sundays. Why?

- Cause Dad took us skiing on Sunday mornings,
  - cause the Christians weren't there...
  - and lines were shorter.
- Some of y'all still do this...ok...

And I got to teach my daughter Harper how to ski last year, and you know what I learned?

- My first impressions about skiing...
- were totally different as a kid...
- than they are as a parent!

## **EASY**

My first impression as a kid was that it was easy to go up skiing...

- My dad drove a 1980s
- Blue Ford Econoline Van
- With a bench seat in the back that folded into a bed
- And curtains on the windows.
  - And this was before #vanlife was a thing, y'all!

This was also back before everyone had 4-Wheel-Drive SUVs,

- And so, when we would head up I-70
- we had to put chains on the tires.
  - You done that lately?
  - No you have not.

But my impression was...it was just a drive...I just sat there!

## SAFE

And my first impression as a kid was that it was safe to go up skiing...

- But in the Econoline...
- There were two captain's chairs in the front...
- two captain's chairs in the middle...
- and that bench seat in the back.
  - And sometimes I'd lose a piece of candy
  - in the bench seat...
    - and I'd reach back there
    - and I'd pull something out.
  - And I'd be like, *"Daddy, what's this?"*
    - It was the seatbelt.
  - And my dad would be like,
    - "Boy, tuck that thing back in there,
    - it's gonna fly around and hurt someone."
  - "Ok Daddy."

My impression was it was safe! Little did I know!

## GEAR

And my first impression as a kid was that all my ski gear just magically appeared! Did I worry about...

- Ski tickets? No.
- Skis? No.
- Poles? No.
- Any of my clothing? No.

All that stuff just miraculously appeared in the back of the van.  
At least that was my impression!

But as I learned when I first took Harper skiing...my first impression about the ease of skiing...was a bit skewed! Cause taking a 5-year-old skiing is quite a production!

## **FIRST IMPRESSIONS**

First impressions are kind of a big deal. Right?

If you have a job interview,

- you probably will pop in a breath mint
- before talking in close proximity
- with someone who can determine your financial future.

You don't want the only thing they remember about you is coffee breath.

And when you go on a first date,

- you're probably not wearing those ratty old sweatpants,
- that you wear when you clean your bathroom,
- with "sassy" written on the back side. Right?

That's hopefully not the first impression you want.

## **EXPLAIN: GOSPELS**

First impressions are really important.

And if you are newer to the Bible, at the beginning of the New Testament are what are known as the four Gospel Accounts.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

- And they are essentially four different bibliographical accounts
- of the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.

And each of these four biographies gives us a first impression that is very important to understanding the birth of Jesus. But each one of these Gospels takes a different angle on their first impression.

Now, “*why four?*” you may ask.

- Well, these are four different authors
- writing from four different perspectives,
- often drawing from different sources,
- and writing with different audiences in mind.

You see, for about 30-40 years after Jesus’ death,

- his disciples have told the stories
- and spread his teachings orally.

But as they got older,

- certain biographers began to write down
- and organize that material
- that it might be passed down to future generations.

Thus, the four gospels.

And when it comes to Christmas,

- if you read the four gospels
- you’ll see that no one Gospel tells you *everything*
- about the birth of Jesus.

And, some Gospels don’t tell you *anything* about the birth of Jesus...

- but even in their silence,
- there is a first impression about the birth of the Son of God.

## TRANSITION

So, what I want to do with our time together tonight is to identify the first impressions that each Gospel writer is trying to make, and see if they resonate with us.

## MATTHEW – HISTORICAL

So, Matthew is the first Gospel in the New Testament. And the first impression Matthew is trying to make is **SLIDE HISTORICAL**.

- Matthew is writing to a predominantly Jewish audience,
- so, he tries to link Jesus to the Old Testament
- as often as possible.

So, Matthew emphasizes things like:

- Jesus being from the line of King David...historical;
- Jesus being a new authoritative teacher like Moses...historical;
- And he even begins with a genealogy!
  - Is there anything more historical than a genealogy?
  - Just a list of names...
  - Matthew was the OG at ancestry.com

But Matthew's point is

- that the birth of the Messiah
- happened in accordance with the scriptures,
- in a real time
- and a real place in history.
- It is HISTORICAL.
- This stuff wasn't made up.

## APPLICATION

And for some of you...this Christmas you need the first impression that is HISTORICAL.

Believe it or not,

- that Jesus Christ was born,
- lived,
- died,
- and that the tomb he was laid in was found empty...
- is a fairly agreed upon fact.

Obviously, not everybody believes that Jesus was immaculately conceived, or that he rose from the dead.

But just about every scholar agrees that:

- a man named Jesus really lived,
- that he was executed by the Romans,
- that he was buried,
- and that on the third day,
  - the tomb where he had been laid,
  - was found empty.

On that point, there is no substantial disagreement.

And you have to decide what to do with Jesus!

I often say this to friends of mine who don't believe in Jesus...

- but there is a wealth of...
- historically documentable evidence...
- for the things Christians believe.

You just must be willing to do the intellectual work to get there.

So, Matthew's first impression is HISTORICAL. This thing really did happen!

## MARK – MORAL

Mark, then, is the second Gospel, and Mark's first impression is

### SLIDE MORAL.

And what's interesting is that Mark skips right over the birth of Jesus. He literally gives us NOTHING!

- "Well," you might say,
- *"then what does this have to do with Christmas?"*

Well, Mark's Gospel opens with the story of John the Baptist

- calling people to repent of sin
- and preparing the way for Jesus to begin his ministry.

And following John the Baptist, Jesus will begin to preach the same message. *"Repent and believe in the gospel!"*

*Repent* is the key word for Mark.

You see, we cannot properly celebrate the birth of our Savior until we acknowledge the reality of our sin.

Until we are willing to repent, all the details that surround Jesus' birth and life are rendered inconsequential.

- Seriously, who cares if it was a silent night?
  - listen... there's nothing silent,
  - calm or bright,
  - about the natural birth process...
  - That song should really be renamed *Crazy Night*



- And who cares if,
  - *“The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,*
  - *But little Lord Jesus no crying he makes.”*
    - Ok, you tell me...
    - if your baby wakes up...
    - and a cow is mooing in his face,
    - you think he’s not freaking out!?!
- And who cares if three ships came sailing in...
  - on Christmas Day,
  - on Christmas Day.
  - Three ships in Jerusalem?!?
  - Yo, Jerusalem is landlocked!
  - Is this some attempt at a maritime Christmas carol?

Like, the three wise men, and the angels, and the shepherds don’t really matter that much unless, like Mark tells us, we are willing to change our lives. Otherwise, it’s pure sentimentality!

## **APPLICATION**

So, are you willing to be changed?

- Maybe this Christmas, for you,
- you need to be willing to acknowledge
- that you are not as you should be?

According to Mark, we cannot properly celebrate the birth of our Savior until we acknowledge our need to be saved. It’s a MORAL first impression.

## LUKE – EMOTIONAL

Luke is gospel number three. And Luke's first impression is

### SLIDE EMOTIONAL.

Now, if you know Luke, you might think that's incorrect of me to point out. Why?

- Because Luke was a physician.
- He was Dr. Luke!
- He had to be a type-A, Enneagram 5!
- *"These are the facts. It happened like this!"*
  - Luke works at Lockheed.
  - Luke lives in the suburbs.
  - Luke has a job.
  - And, not just any job...
    - he has a job in the field
    - that he actually went to school for!

So, Luke wants to write a clear, precise, historical account.

But, then why do I say EMOTIONAL. Well, Luke, unlike any of the other Gospels, pays close attention to the worship that surrounded the birth of Jesus.

- For example, in Luke 1:46,
  - Luke uniquely records for us
  - how Mary expressed her worship
  - in a poem or song called the Magnificat.

- And then in verses 67-79,
  - after the birth of his son, John,
  - and his mute tongue being loosed,
  - Zechariah praises and worships God.
  - And Luke is the only writer who captures that.
- Additionally, Luke alone tells us of the heavenly host praising God and the shepherds praising God.
- And finally, when Jesus is presented in the temple, Luke records one more poem: Simeon's worship upon seeing the child.

Before, during, and after the birth of Jesus there is emotional worship!

## **APPLICATION**

And perhaps you are in that place tonight!

- The birth of a savior,
- who is Christ the Lord
- wells up in you such fervor...
- such emotion...
- such delight...
- that you just want to worship him!

And much like the Psalms of the Old Testament,

- the details of these expressions of worship
- are not given to simply inform us of past events,
- but to invite us to join in their expression.

When all the facts are considered, as Luke claims to have compiled them, one discovers that the Christmas story is not only true but also glorious.

It's EMOTIONAL.

## JOHN – RELATIONAL

And finally, the fourth Gospel is John's Gospel. And it is certainly the most unique in what it says about Christmas. And John's first impression is

### SLIDE RELATIONAL.

The Gospel According to John

- does not begin with the birth of Jesus...
- the ministry of John the Baptist...
- nor does he begin with the history of Israel.

It's why I think, when it comes to the Gospels, many people like John more.

You see,

- John was a creative.
- John would have lived in the Highlands.
- John liked craft coffee.
- John wore skinny jeans.
- Was probably tatted all up!
  - John was an artist...
  - creative...
  - and unemployed. Right?
- "In the beginning was the Word...
- and the Word was...
- with God."

And the other disciples are like,

- “Are you alright?”
- Cause you sound like you’re weird.
- Just tell them what happened!”

And John’s like,

- “It’s not about what happened...”
- it’s about how we experienced what happened...
- man!”

But according to John,

- Jesus was with God
- and Jesus was God
- from before time began.

He begins with the relationship between Jesus and his Father.

Then he moves into Jesus’ relationship with the world.

- He came to his own people.
- And to all who received him,
- He gave the right to become children of God.
- The Son of God put on human flesh and lived with us!

This is highly relational.

And as it relates to the Christmas story, John’s account is similar to Mark’s in that he makes the story immediately personal.

- Jesus is the unique Son of God
- who came into the world,
- so that you and I could become children of God as well.

## APPLICATION

You see, the four gospels give four edges to the Christmas story. And the Christmas story meets us right where we are.

- Some of us need a historical push...
  - that these things really happened.
- Others a moral push.
  - Man, you've just been sinking...
  - barely keeping your head above water!
- Some are emotionally ready to come and adore him.

But for all, the Christmas story is meant to draw us

- into a relationship with God.

## CONCLUSION

So, what do you believe about these things?

- The child who was born
- would grow up to be a man...
- who would die on a cross...
- and would wash us with his blood,
- cleansing us from all our sin.

Do you know this Jesus?

Do you know that this is why we celebrate Christmas?

- If not, you can know him...
- you can follow him...
- all you have to do is pray to him tonight and say,
- *“Jesus, I give you my life.”*

Here's what we're celebrating tonight:

"And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn."

- And that baby is Emmanuel, God with us.
- He has come to seek and save the lost.
- And salvation is found in no other name,
- than the name of this child, Jesus Christ.

Merry Christmas.

Let's pray. **BLANK SLIDE W/PADS**

## **CANDLES**

Well, we're going to sing in response to this message, and during the very last song, we're going to light our candles. So, when Amanda gives us the go-ahead, I'll start my candle, and then you can light yours off of mine, and pass it down your rows. Please tip your unlit candles into the lit ones, parents, help out your kiddos. And we'll lift them up during the last chorus of the song, just be careful not to burn our ceiling!

Love you church, let's stand and sing.

**RESOURCES USED:**

- Nenadov, Petar. *Four Accounts, One Savior*.