

Andy Stanley: Hi everybody, Merry Christmas. And thank you so much for inviting us into your home. You know, normally in the month of December, on the last Sunday of December, I'll take some time to read the Christmas story to our entire congregation. Of course, this year is like no other year, so we thought we would take this opportunity to read the Christmas story together.

Sandra Stanley: But instead of reading it, maybe you should just recite it.

Andy Stanley: Recite the entire Christmas story from memory? As many times as I've read this beautiful story, I have not committed it to memory.

Sandra Stanley: I have.

Andy Stanley: You've memorized the entire Christmas story?

Sandra Stanley: Yep.

Andy Stanley: So this year instead of reading the Christmas story, Sandra is going to recite the Christmas story. Sandra.

Sandra Stanley: 'Twas the night before Christmas when all through the house, not a creature was stirring...

Andy Stanley: Not that Christmas story.

Sandra Stanley: I know, I'm just kidding. So gather with everyone in your home, grab some hot chocolate, and for the next 25 minutes or so you are going to experience the Christmas story like you never have before.

Andy Stanley: That's exactly right. We hope you enjoy this.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, along with all the living creatures that inhabit this living planet. And then as a grand finale, his opus magnum, God created the

human race. He created them in his image. But in time, the human race, which has the freedom to choose as God chooses, became a rebel race. But God is love. So he used his freedom to set in motion a plan designed to redeem and restore his image-bearers without removing his image. God's plan began with a man, Abraham, whose family would eventually become an entire nation. And God promised Abraham that through his descendants God would eventually send a Savior to address once and for all the source and the consequences of sin in the world. But when?

Centuries passed. Kingdoms rose and fell. Sin rolled through creation like a tsunami polluting and corrupting everything it touched. And just when it seemed that nothing would ever change, that God's promise to Abraham would not be kept, everything changed. When the set time had fully come, once God had everything and everyone in place, he sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that God's image-bearing race might receive adoption to sonship.

Now this is how the birth of Jesus, the Messiah, finally came about. God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a young girl pledged by her parents to be married to a man named Joseph, who was a descendant of Abraham. And the young girl's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored. The Lord is with you". But of course, Mary was greatly troubled at his words, and wondered, "What is happening? Is this even happening? Am I dreaming"? But the angel smiled and said to her, "Mary, do not be afraid. You have found favor with God. The promise you and your people have longed to see fulfilled is being fulfilled through you. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. And he will be the great one, and he will be called the Son of the Most High". "But how can this be"? Mary asked. "How can I have a baby? Joseph and I are not even..." But the angel interrupted and said, "It has all been arranged. And your son will be called the Son of God, for no word from God will ever fail, Mary. No promise from God will go unkept".

Mary fell to her knees and declared, "I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled". But when she looked up, the angel was gone. And just as the angel had said, a baby began to grow in Mary's womb. And she was both amazed and terrified. Who would believe her story? As the time for the birth of the baby drew near, the Roman emperor decided to conduct a census of the entire Roman world. Everyone was required to return to their birthplace to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem, because he belonged to the house and the line of David, and he took Mary with him. But when they arrived in Bethlehem, all the inns and the guesthouses were full. So Joseph found a dry stable, and made Mary as comfortable as possible. And while they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. And she wrapped him in cloths, but she placed him in a manger.

As it turned out, that very night there were shepherds living out in the fields watching over their sheep, unaware that just a few miles away in the overcrowded town of Bethlehem

something extraordinary had taken place. As they were settling in for the night, suddenly the angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone all around them. And they were... Well, they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news. The good news your people have been waiting on since the days of Abraham. Today, in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you, and he is the Messiah, the Lord. But don't go in search of a king. Look for a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger".

So they hurried off and they found Mary and Joseph and, sure enough, a baby who was in fact lying in a manger. And when they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child. And all who heard it, everyone who heard it, they were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. Amazed and hopeful. They were hopeful because God was once again on the move. He had not forgotten his promise. God had become flesh, and had moved in with the rebel race he came to save.

Andy Stanley: Once again, thank you so much for joining us. We hope you and your family have a very merry Christmas.

Sandra Stanley: And we will see you right back here on January 3rd.

Andy Stanley: That's right, merry Christmas.

Sandra Stanley: Merry Christmas.

View More Visit: [Church Loaded Today](#)