

## **Intro - David**

I drive my family crazy with my constant questions,  
Who's the best....?  
What's your favorite....?  
On a scale of 1-10....?

You know...The best restaurant you ever ate at? Your favorite movie of all time?  
The #1 baseball player of all time? The most important person in American  
history?

Everybody hates my questions, so I thought what better time to do it than  
Christmas Eve?

Alida and I are going to look at the Christmas story, all the key players, and ask  
you to think along with us: Who, or what, is the most important part of  
Christmas?

The newborn baby Jesus? Or Santa Claus? A live Christmas Tree? Or Christmas  
carols?

Well, we're going to focus on the people of that first Christmas. Who's the #1  
most important MVP of the Christmas story?

## ALIDA: SHEPHERDS

Okay, so, top of the MVP list, I say we have to start with the shepherds.  
I mean, they kicked off the Christmas story.

God chose the shepherds to be the first people on earth to hear the Christmas message.

Those humble, hardworking, blue collar, night shift shepherds were the first ones to hear “Good News for all people.”

God could have gone to the king,  
or the Roman Governor  
or the Chief Priest of the Temple in Jerusalem  
or whoever the celebrities were way back then.

Whoever had that Taylor Swift, Patrick Mahomes, Elon Musk name recognition going for them.

That’s who God could have gone to.

The influencers.

Instead, God chooses shepherds.

Maybe God thought: who else would be up late in the middle of the night, wide awake, eyes open, on the alert?

To top it off, the shepherds not only heard the message,  
they completely, one hundred percent believed it!

Baby lying in a manger, Savior of the world.

Crazy as it must have sounded, they were all in.

Once the angels finished singing “Peace on earth, good will toward all,” those shepherds immediately started running down the hill.

You’ve just gotta love them for their willingness abandon their sheep,  
their livelihood, and take this leap of faith –

you’ve gotta admire them for their crazy hope-filled faithfulness.

They were all in.

Ran to downtown Bethlehem, searched for the stable, found the Holy Family, “oohed” and “aaahed” and rejoiced.

AND THEN ran off in every direction to tell the whole neighborhood, family, friends, and neighbors.

They made sure everyone heard the same good news that they had heard.

So I vote for the shepherds.

They were genuinely the first responders!

And, in the most true and beautiful sense of the word, they were the first evangelists, the first ones to share the good news.

Shepherds – MPVs for sure.

## David - ANGEL

You are so wrong; the shepherds aren't even in the top 4!

If "kicking it off" is your criteria, that award goes to the angel, Gabriel.

God needed to get Mary's attention, and agreement. And Joseph's attention, and agreement, and it had to be believable. Gabriel made it believable. The angel couldn't come across like "Casper, the Friendly Ghost", or something scary. Not like some heavenly, Marvel cartoonish superhero.

Gabriel had to be convincing, and encouraging.

Mary and Joseph needed to know that Gabriel truly came straight from God. This wasn't just a dream, or a feeling. This was God's messenger; AND that the message was doable, legit; miraculous, yes, but not silly. AND, that God would back it up.

Not like those "Mission Impossible" movies where the unseen mystery voice says, "Should you or any of your team get caught we will disavow any knowledge of you." God wasn't going to abandon Mary and Joseph. Gabriel's message was a "WE" message.

"WE". God was saying, me and you two. We will make this happen. You are not alone.

Above all, Gabriel succeeded.

Mary and Joseph, given the extraordinary opportunity to bring God to life in human form both said a rather simple "ok". Mary's answer was a bit more poetic, "Here I am, let it be according to your word."

Good job, Gabriel!

## **Alida - MARY**

Okay, first of all – NO.

Gabriel is definitely below the shepherds.

Don't get me wrong, Gabriel is very cool and extremely impressive.

But if Mary hadn't said "yes," we'd never have even heard of Gabriel.

No Mary, no Christmas.

Which means I now have to revise my previously stated opinion.

Much as I love the Shepherds, the Shepherds and Gabriel have to make way on the list for my new MVP choice, which is Mary:

There is – quite clearly – no Jesus without Mary.

The whole Christmas plan was to deliver (pun intended) the fullness of God, the presence of God to this earth,

to bring God to humanity in a form that we would understand and relate to – God in human form.

Not to get all theological about it but that IS what the "Incarnation" means. IN-Carnation.

To "put flesh on", literally. "Skin in the game".

Mary was the one who made it work from the human side.

Confronted by an overwhelming challenge,

an unlikely, illogical, unscientific task,

a hard-to-believe reality,

a miracle at the far end of miraculous...

Mary took a deep breath and said "okay."

And there was a lot of courage in that 'okay.'

Down by the library at Fairfield University,

there's a really lovely statue of Mary and next to it is the prayer that everyone who grew up Catholic already knows:

"Hail Mary, full of Grace, the Lord is with Thee.

Blessed art thou among women.”

That greeting is straight from the Christmas story in the Bible.

That’s what Mary’s cousin, Elizabeth, said to her when they met up, both miraculously pregnant, both about to mother into existence a new kingdom of love.

God needed both of those women. All women.

So Mary – MVP of the Christmas Story - **BREAK** -

## **David - JOSEPH**

We have to mention Joseph, right?! He's not #1, 2, 3, or 4 in importance, he's forever consigned to the sideline; but give Joseph his due, he hung in there. Faced with a pregnant wife not of his doing, he chose to believe in the grace of God at work in ways beyond understanding.

Sometimes that's what love is.

Sometimes that's what faith is.

Sometimes that's what family is.

All Joseph had going for him was just that: family, faith, and love. And that was enough.

## WISE MEN

So, now I'm thinking that the Magi, the Kings, The Wise Men,  
they have to up near the top.

These folks really made an effort, they literally went the extra mile... or 500  
miles, really, to be part of the Christmas story.

Let's remember the background: These Wise People, these Magi, were, by  
profession, seekers of knowledge, probably astronomers,  
people who studied the world around them and tried to make sense of it.  
And they spotted a star up in the heavens.

In all honesty, it was bright enough for everyone to see.

David remembers going to the Hayden Planetarium  
when he was a kid,

and sitting there in those reclining chairs gazing up at a huge bright star in the  
sky,

and Planetarium guides telling them that

“yes, absolutely, about that time there was a convergence of three stars that  
would have lit up the sky

and anybody that wanted to could have taken notice.”

It was the Magi who took notice.

They made the connection,

they realized that something big was happening in their world.

And so, they set out on their great adventure, following that wandering star all the  
way to Bethlehem.

What they're famous for is that they brought gifts,

and ever since, gift giving is a big part of Christmas!

When we offer up gifts to one another,

we're actually honoring that moment when a bunch of weary astronomers  
knelt down in the hay

and offered up that gold and frankincense and myrrh.



So when we open up gifts that someone chose with love,  
or when we watch someone else open up the gift we hope will be just right,  
it's all because of those Wise Folks who noticed, and believed, and journeyed,  
and gave what they had, with all of their heart.  
They definitely deserve a spot on the MVP list.

## David - JESUS

Jesus is the obvious choice. As the sayings go: “Jesus is the REASON for the SEASON” and “Keep Christ in Christmas”.

Nobody says, “Keep the shepherds in Christmas.”

Jesus is God’s message, God’s gift, God’s son, God’s essence, God’s visual.

One of David’s (my) favorite quotes, we can’t remember who said it, but David (I) uses/use it all the time:

“If you have a hard time figuring out God, or God seems too remote, don’t worry about it. Focus on Jesus. Jesus is the Near End of God.”

Jesus... is the Near End... of God.

Alida and I trade off going to Bruce Springsteen/Green Day concerts, intermingled with University of Virginia Basketball games. Sometimes we sit so far back, the bands and the players are so tiny, they are indistinguishable.

But thanks to gigantic jumbotrons at today’s arenas, you can see their artistry, you can see them sweat, and grimace. You can see their fingers fly over the guitar.

You can see brilliance, intensity, and focus. Jumbotron takes what is too remote, too far away, and brings the “near end” of your favorite band... your favorite team to larger than life.

That’s Jesus.

Remember, we call it Christ-mas. Christ-mas. Not shepherd-mas. Not Santa-mas. Not gift-mas.

It’s Christ-mas.

## YOU

I'm going to close us out by taking this in a whole different direction.  
 If we're talking about who's our MVP,  
 who's the most important part of Christmas,  
 well maybe, just maybe, it's YOU.  
 Yes, I really mean **you**, I'm not talking to the person behind you,  
 I mean you.  
 Maybe you, we, me, us, we are the most important part of Christmas!

Perhaps the most important line in the Gospels is this –  
*For God so loved the world that God gave his only-begotten son.*  
 God gave, God gifted this world with the child of Bethlehem.  
 The Wise men brought gifts to Jesus, true enough.  
 But Christmas is God's gift to *us*.  
 Christ is a gift to us. The next part is up to – us.

For Christmas to make a difference,  
 for this extraordinary gift to matter,  
 well, that's where we need a whole *bunch* of people  
 to be team players, and all most valuable.

For this next chapter in the Christmas story,  
 we are all needed to strive for MVP.

We are needed to be like the wise people,  
 our eyes ever open to God's presence,  
 our spirits always willing to follow God's call.

We're needed to be angels, turning up where we are most needed  
 on a mission from God –  
 which is to say, any mission that brings good news and great hope to people.

We're needed to be like Mary, like Joseph, knowing that we have been chosen by God to make a world of difference,  
and always being willing to say "yes" to God.  
We're needed to be like the shepherds,  
doing what needs to be done, yes,  
but being willing to be surprised by grace,  
being willing to be amazed by hope,  
willing to take a leap of faith and believe the crazy truth  
of God's powerful love.

And, to truly be the MVPs of this next chapter of the story,  
we're needed to be like Jesus.

Yes, like Jesus.

We talk about "Christlikeness" in our church all the time.  
And we mean it. 'Cause why not aim high?

So, in truth, it's YOU.

For the story of Christmas to be told from this day on,  
it's you who will be its most valuable player,  
the most needed part of the story.

It's you who will not only tell the good news, but live it.

It's you whose love will move this world toward peace,  
one moment of compassion at a time.

It's you whose faith will carry the light into the shadows,  
it's you whose hope will lift others.

God so loved the world that God gave his child Jesus.

And Jesus gave to the world – you.

You to be his hands,

you to be his heart,

you to be his love.

You to be the most important part of this story.

Merry Christmas to all of you – Christ’s MVP’s.