

**Wanted: Early Starters**  
**From the Series, "Holiday Season Want Ads"**  
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**Introduction**

"The early bird catches the worm." That's a common saying. Apparently, it's been around for a long time. One source I looked at traces it to the 1600s. At that time, someone said, "The early bird catcheth the worme."



This saying has been around for centuries. Here's why: It's true!

It starts in the life of a little bird, and a little worm. Apparently, worms don't like sun and heat. They like cool and damp. So, they come out in the cool of night. For a bird, the worms are hard to see at night because it's dark. But then, the sun comes up. At that time, there are lots of juicy little worms just waiting to become breakfast.

But there's a catch. Once the sun is up for a while, the grounds begins to heat up. It begins to dry up. So, the worms start to burrow down back into the ground. If you're a bird, the best, and maybe the only time to catch a worm is early after the sun comes up. If you're a bird, and you like to sleep late, there will be no worms for you.

So, it's only the early bird that catches the worm. The reason we have the saying is that on some level, this represents a principle for us humans. We have a certain amount of time in life. If we want to accomplish anything, we need to make good use of that time.

I once heard a speaker on the radio complimenting a well-known businessman. Here was the compliment: "This man never wastes a minute." So, we get a principle in the business world. If you want to be successful, you need to do two things: 1) Start early. 2) Make good use of your time.

We're in our Advent season series: Holiday Season Want Ads. Today, our want ad is something that is surely valuable in the business world. Wanted: Early Starters. Right now, is when I get the questions. First, the regular attenders scratch their heads and ask: "This is church. What has this to do with the Bible." The visitors say, "This is Christmas. What has any of this to do with Christmas."

As always, I'm glad you asked. Let's find out by reading a well-known part of the Christmas story. One day, an angel appears to a young girl named Mary. Mary doesn't know what's going on, so she's afraid.

But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. (Luke 1:30-35)

We've just heard about the way that Jesus started his life on earth. He was conceived through a miraculous act of God. It's the event we celebrate at Christmas.

This is a well-known story that many of our readers have heard many times. Let's look at this event another way by asking a question: When did Jesus start his work on earth? Answer: At conception. You can't start any earlier than that!

We believe that Jesus was God. He existed before, well before, the time he entered the body of a child on earth. Why did Jesus have to start so early? This must have been hard on any levels. How do you squeeze an infinite being into a tiny baby in a womb? God can do anything. He could have made an adult human body out of the dust, just like he did with Adam. Jesus could have entered an adult human body and saved himself a lot of trouble. Why the baby? Why go all the way back to conception?

Because being a baby was part of the many tasks that Jesus had. One of the tasks Jesus had to accomplish was to experience all the things that normal humans experience. The all-powerful God had to experience what it's like to be a powerless child in a womb. He had to experience what it's like to be born. Giving birth is very painful for women – Apparently, it's not fun for the baby, either.

When Jesus lived in the realms of heaven, he had everything he could possibly want. He had to experience what it was like to be born into a poor family. So poor, he was born in a stable.

In heaven, anything Jesus wanted could be given him by angels - Immediately. Babies, on the other hand, get hungry. Then they cry. Then, even the best of parents take some time to bring food. Jesus had to experience what it was like to be hungry and to have to wait for food.

Sometimes children have bad experiences growing up. Sometimes, they're bullied. Sometimes, other children steal things. In heaven, it was safe. Jesus had to live through the painful things that children experience.

In heaven, Jesus spoke, and things happened. On earth, Jesus had to work long hours as a carpenter. In heaven, Jesus had the worship of angelic beings. On earth, he experienced disbelief and mocking. The plan on earth included Jesus being falsely accused and arrested. He was beaten and eventually tortured to death on a cross.

Why did he have to do all this?

He had to do all this for two reasons. They're mentioned in the book of Hebrews.

### **Reason 1**

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:15-16)

A priest is someone who represents us before God. Jesus wanted to do that for us. He wants to be our high priest. To be the best priest, you have to understand the people you represent. Jesus wanted to experience every pain you and I feel. He wanted to go through every temptation that we face. This allows him to truly understand us. He understands every pain. He understands every failure. So now, we can approach God's throne with confidence. We can find mercy in our time of need. Because we have a high priest who understands us.

### **Reason 2**

But Jesus did even more. In the Old Testament days, the high priest offered sacrifices for the people. Jesus, the great high priest, offered himself. In order to do that, to be worthy to do that, he had to live a perfect life.

Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. (Hebrews 7:26)

If Jesus merely understood us, that would be great. But he does far more. He faced every temptation that we face, and never sinned. That's why he can offer himself for us. We don't have to do anything more. Jesus did it all.

Jesus had a big job to do. He had to live a life that allowed him to understand us. And he had to live it perfectly so he could offer himself for the sins of the world. In order to do that, he started early. And he had to use his time effectively. From the moment he was conceived until his death on the cross, Jesus didn't waste a minute. He lived every minute for you and for me.

Wait! Did I say Jesus started his work at conception? This all took planning. During the regular season, we're studying the book of Matthew. There's a phrase that Matthew uses a lot in his book. When he told the story of Christ's virgin conception, he said this:

"All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet..."  
(Matthew 1:22)

A lot of the things Jesus did were predicted centuries before he was born. In order to do that, God had to plan in advance. Way in advance. Talk about starting early! Do you know how far back God had to plan? Here's something we read about Jesus in the book of Revelation:

(Jesus is) ...the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world. (Revelation 13:8)

God planned so far back that he knew Jesus would die for the sins of the world ***before the world was even created***. He started early.

### **Why are we discussing all this?**

So now we come to another question: Why are we talking about all this? We're talking about all this because it gives us a picture of a very big God. Let's learn how big.

## A. God is Eternal

God is eternal. Let's read about why that's important.

23 Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; 24 but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. 25 Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. (Hebrews 7:23-25)

Imagine that you trusted in Jesus. You believe you're going to heaven. But when you get to heaven, the angel at the gate says this: "Yes, Jesus rose from the dead, but later he died of old age - We're so sorry." No! That will never happen because Jesus lives forever. That's why he can offer us eternal life. He will always be there for us.

Let's learn something else about the size of our God.

## B. God is All-Powerful

Not only is God eternal, but he is also all-powerful.

Let's read:

1 Lord, you have been our dwelling place  
throughout all generations.  
2 Before the mountains were born  
or you brought forth the whole world,  
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.  
(Psalm 90:1-2)

God started his plan before the creation of the world. So he was present before the world was created, and he'll be around long after the world ends. But think about this: If you were eternal, and you had no power, that would be a problem. What makes God great is that he is able to create a plan, and then make his plan take place. He planned a world and it came to be. He planned mountains, and they happened. He planned humanity and created a plan for us. A plan that allowed us to live with him for all eternity. His plan will happen. It will come to completion. Why? Because God is all powerful. He can make his plan happen.

Now, here's the big question.

## How do we respond?

How do we respond to all this?

### A. Worship

First, we respond in awe and wonder. We join with the shepherds and the wise men and the angels. We let ourselves marvel that everything we've discussed could be wrapped up in a little baby. Let us fall at his feet and worship.

### B. Bible Examples

#### 1) Peter and Andrew

Next, let's take some hints from people in the Bible.

18 As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 19 "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." 20 At once they left their nets and followed him. (Mathew 4:18-20)

Here are some simple fishermen. They see Jesus. He says, "follow me". They follow right away. What made them do that?

In ancient Israel, many young children were sent to the synagogue school to learn about their faith. There, they learned about one called the Messiah. Peter and Andrew likely came from a family that did this. One day, the Messiah appeared. Peter and Andrew recognized them. Why? Because their parents allowed them to start early. They started young learning about faith. When the Messiah called, they knew to follow.

Here's an important fact: The most influential people in the early church were all people who grew up with faith. They were trained in the Scriptures. The people in history who made the most impact on their world for Jesus were people who started early. They grew up in a culture influenced by the Bible.

I appreciate it when people come to church and bring their children. There is no greater gift you can gift a young person than a knowledge of faith. There is no greater gift than allowing your children to start early learning about God. Let's look at another example from the Bible.

## **2. Matthew the Tax Collector**

Another image is the Apostle Matthew. Like Peter and Andrew, Matthew was likely sent to the synagogue school as a child. Sadly, he fell away at some point. He joined a group known as the tax collectors. Tax collectors in ancient Israel are a long story. For now, let's call them "legal criminals". In those days, the Romans had invaded Israel. They demanded heavy taxes with little in return. Tax gatherers were Hebrews who helped the Romans to take money from their countrymen. You can imagine that they were despised.

Although Matthew grew up knowing the right way to live, he fell away. But one day, he met Jesus. When he met Jesus, he came back.

Maybe you grew up hearing about Jesus. You started early. But for some reason you fell away. Let the God of eternity fill you with the awe and wonder of Christmas Then, come back. You still have lots of time in life to use for God.

Let's look at one more.

## **3. The thief on the cross.**

On the day that Jesus was crucified, there was not only one cross. There were at least three. On either side of Jesus were two criminals - Really bad criminals - Criminals worthy of death by crucifixion.

We started by mentioning the idea that there are people who never waste a minute of their lives. These men go down in history as symbols of people who wasted every minute.

One of the criminals foolishly took the few minutes he had left on the earth and joined with the mob - He hurled insults at Jesus.

The other though did something wise. Up to this point, he had wasted every minute of his life. He realized that he had only a few minutes left. He decided to use those minutes to great effect. He asked Jesus to remember him. Jesus did. Because of the criminal's wise decision, Jesus said he would see paradise. The criminal had only a few minutes of life, but he decided to use them to follow God.

Maybe you're like the criminal, and you feel like you've wasted your life? Maybe you haven't wasted it on criminal activities. However, you haven't used any time to follow God. I don't know how many minutes you have left in life, but why not use them for eternal wisdom? Make this the day that you choose to follow Jesus.

Let us tell you how. You'll see some instructions at the end of this article.

Let's pull this all together.

## **Conclusion**

We started our discussion today with a want ad: "Wanted: Early Starters". If you've been following our series, you know that we always change the want ad after learning some things. Today, no! We're keeping it just like it is. We want early starters. We want people who understand that the eternal God had a plan that started before the creation of the world. He started early and used every minute. That plan involved his son coming to earth and being born as a tiny baby on the first Christmas day. Jesus started early and used every minute. He used every minute for us.

Let the eternal God fill your heart with wonder of what he did for us so many years ago in Bethlehem. Make the decision to use your life effectively, following God and discovering the love he has for you. If you've never asked God to be your Lord and Savior, start today! Let us tell you how.

May you have a Christmas filled with love of Christ.

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### **To Learn More:**

You can learn how to begin a new life in Jesus Christ by visiting Billy Graham's excellent web site: [PeaceWithGod.net](http://PeaceWithGod.net)

Next, consider visiting our Church. You can get directions on our web site: [TrinityTeaneck.org](http://TrinityTeaneck.org)

Or, visit my site: [PhilBrainerd.com](http://PhilBrainerd.com)