

Christmas Hope

December 24, 2008

Somewhat miffed at all the Grinches that are trying to steal Christmas, I had written a message for tonight that was a defense of who came on Christmas. In the middle of the night, the Lord woke me and gave me the message I'm supposed to share in place of the one I had prepared. Then I realized that you would be here tonight because you don't need a defense. You want to hear about the hope and joy that is Christmas. And after all, isn't that hope and joy the best defense of why we celebrate?

The host of characters in the Christmas story offers us all a message of hope and encouragement. The first in the cast is Mary, a young woman from a poor family in an insignificant town. An angel appeared to her and announced God's mission for her. God didn't pick a Jewish princess dwelling in luxury in the Herodian. He didn't even go to the capital city, but to the village of Nazareth.

Mary was somewhat bewildered with her circumstances. Her cousin Elizabeth believed her because of the miracle happening in her own life, but very few others did. Do you think anyone would believe you if you had an experience like that? Even her betrothed didn't believe her at first. Then you have to wonder if she didn't doubt God's choosing her to bring the Savior into the world. Christmas is for young mothers who are misunderstood and bewildered about the circumstances in their life.

We all have one thing in common with Mary. We carry the Savior in us as well. We feel as unworthy as she surely did. We also feel at times that God may have made the wrong choice. We think so many others could do a better job, but here He is living in us. Like Mary, we ponder what exactly our mission is and if we are living our calling as God intended.

Joseph is the next character. Jewish builders barely made enough to live on. Looking at his status in life, you'd never know he had royal blood. What would you think if the girl you were engaged to told you this story of a miraculous conception? God answered Joseph's dilemma with a dream that assured him that her story was true. Then it must have hit him. "How can I father the Messiah?" Talk about feeling inadequate. He just doubted the most important story the world had ever heard, and still God chose him.

Many of us can relate to Joseph. Especially us fathers. How can we be the husband and father we should be? Our children make poor choices and we feel completely inadequate in knowing what we are supposed to say or how we are supposed to respond. Will we always be able to meet our family's need? In so many ways we feel inadequate for the responsibilities God has given us.

Then there are the shepherds. Shepherds were at the bottom of the social ladder in Israel. When the angels appeared to them and told them the news they had to wonder why the message was given to them. They weren't even trusted to testify in a court of law and now they have the most important message the world has heard. Shepherds felt unappreciated and insignificant like many of us. They went out and told what they had seen anyway. God does send His good news through the humblest of servants.

Maybe you can relate to the shepherds. You have this good news but you think no one will listen because of your position in society. The messengers' status in society has nothing to do with the importance of the message they bring. If you feel unappreciated and insignificant, the shepherd's story is for you.

Finally there are the Magi. Three men of means that didn't fit in the society in which they lived. Imagine telling your fellow countrymen that you are going to another nation to give an expensive gift to their newborn king. They might think you had been studying too long. You certainly would feel you were out of place, a loner, and misunderstood. But God gave each Magi two others that shared the same vision. What a blessing to have even a few others that share your passion! And so they went bearing their gifts that would finance the flight to Egypt.

Consider the fact that God did not pull this cast of characters out of their difficult situations but provided what they needed in the midst of it. God gave Mary the trust of Elizabeth and Joseph to encourage her heart and help her through that time when all others doubted her. He gave Joseph a dream to help him see the truth and overcome his doubts and fears. He gave the shepherds a message and direction to show them they were valued and important to God. And He gave the Magi the two others to share their vision and a star to guide them. Who but God could come up with such a hope filled story that includes the things we all face?

There is one more thing, the greatest thing. God gave His Son. You see, all these characters made it into the story because they (in the words of another) "glanced at their problems but gazed at their Savior."

This Christmas story is for us, the doubters, those who feel inadequate or unworthy, the insignificant, the rejected, and the loners. It tells us God cares about the least. It tells us that God doesn't rescue us from the world's conditions but gives us what we need to see us through. It tells us to glance at our troubles but gaze on our Savior. He is God's answer to our greatest need, our sin sick souls. That is why Christmas is so full of hope, joy, and peace. I feel sorry for those who don't get it. Yes, He came to be a king, but what a glorious King who cares for and includes the least and meets our deepest need.

Communion