

Christmas Eve Sermon: 6pm Candlelight Service, 12/24/20

Christmas begins with Luke 1:26-38 as it tells us the story of Gabriel announcing to Mary that she would bear a child, Jesus, the savior of the world. Just a humble teenage age girl, bearing a child out of wedlock in a terror filled world...that's the history of where this begins. Knowing the history is really important.

To illustrate, there's a story about A couple of friends decided to go up to a cabin together, at night, they sat around the fireplace in the living room and shared their lives. One night, one of them started talking about their family, its whole history. His story unfolded like a PBS "finding your roots" program. Riveted, one friend said, "I wish I knew more about my family." Another said, "me too, but it takes time, money for research". "Yeah I always wanted to have my family traced" another replied. The story teller reacted, "Can I give you a suggestion?" They all sat up, "Yeah, we're all ears". "It's a sure- fire answer, just Run for public office." "What?' the party questioned. "Yeah—run for public office, you see Politicians have little privacy when they run for office. Their family history becomes a public domain."

We know that if you're famous you aren't left alone. Everyone craves the juicy news about you, and clambers around to get every tidbit. It was no different for Jesus. He could not escape that yearning desire of people digging up the dirt. Jesus' beginning you see was scandalous. Born from an unwed mother, that could mean a huge disgrace and it could mean stoning for adultery, it's not something you want. Tonight, I want to learn something about Jesus's Mother, how her world is much like our, and how her faith is an shining example for us as we live in our world.

Let me share another little story...

A police officer pulled a guy over for speeding and had the following exchange: Officer: May I see your driver's license? Driver: I don't have one. I had it suspended when I got my 5th DUI. (Driving Under the Influence)

Officer: May I see the registration for this vehicle? Driver: It's not my car. I stole it.

Officer: The car is stolen? Driver: That's right. But come to think of it, I think I saw the registration in the glove box when I was putting my gun in there.

Officer: There's a gun in the glove box? Driver: Yes sir. That's where I put it after I shot and killed the woman who owns this car and stuffed her in the trunk.

Officer: There's a BODY in the TRUNK?!?!? Driver: Yes, sir.

Hearing this, the officer immediately called his captain. The car was quickly surrounded by police, and the captain approached the driver to handle the tense situation:

Captain: Sir, can I see your license? Driver: Sure. Here it is. It was valid.

Captain: Who's car is this? Driver: It's mine, officer. Here's the registration.

Captain: Could you slowly open your glove box so I can see if there's a gun in it? Driver: Yes, sir, but there's no gun in it. Sure enough, there was nothing in the glove box.

Captain: Would you mind opening your trunk? I was told you said there's a body in it.

Driver: No problem. The trunk was opened; no body.

Captain: I don't understand it. The officer who stopped you said you told him you didn't have a license, stole the car, had a gun in the glovebox, and that there was a dead body in the trunk.

Driver: Yeah, I'll bet he told you I was speeding, too."

Poor officer, I'm sure he'd like to rip his hair out or at least run away for a while. And here's Mary, perhaps thinking of marriage, preparing for the big day, already pledged to be married to a man named Joe, dreaming of driving the family camel, with kids arguing about who gets to sit in front, and just being the perfect patient mom. Then an angel appeared. Let me repeat...then.. an... angel... appeared.

Yeah, I could just imagine what you'd say if I told you an angel came to me and told me I was the next great whatever next to sliced bread. You'd say, Oh, that's nice PM, lets have you have a chat with the Bishop, obviously Memorial is overworking you. Ever wonder how Mary felt? "Mary was greatly TROUBLED at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be." Mary's not flat character from the past, no, she's 3D. She lived, she was important, she is a real living example to us, as she lived in her 3D world—a dicey, dangerous, dark—troubled world one just like ours.

Mary lived in crisis...a time of Roman occupation, a time of great disease, a time of great need. And here more crisis hits her world...She's visited by an angel. Told she's a mother to a premarital pregnancy. Told this baby was going to be the Messiah. I mean, could you handle all that, especially as a female teen in her world?

Tonight, we are in this 3D world... in 2020...a year soon to be used as a swear word. Imagine it, "What in the 2020 is going on here?" 2020 is Dicey, dangerous, dark. We live with a Pandemic that threatens our lives, relationships, finances, the whole world. We have Racial discord that erupts into Riots and death and cries out for our tender healing attention. We have an election that at best results in a suet with officials that seem to do some pretty dastardly things. We are in a world covered in hunger, need, healing. What's the worst...wearing masks, or fighting over that, fear of the unknown, the toilet paper crisis, having to close down businesses and make churches unable to meet face to face, not being allowed to travel or even eat Christmas dinner together, home schooling, everything is virtual and a lot of folks don't run computers then the worry for overworked hospitals and medical staff, then no sports -- Where does it end? What are we living for?

What is the answer? I remember the story of 15-year-old Jason Ricciuti, a member of the Kelowna Midget AA all-star hockey team. He hung himself in a Surrey motel room one Saturday night after being caught with pot and apparently he thought his life is over, that he'd never play hockey again. It is a tragic statement that the father said - "He lived for hockey. He loved to play hockey." What do we live for when it seems so dark?

In the Bible, we find Mary's friends, family, and countrymen, suffered through some pretty similar unstable troubled times, both politically and economically, asking the same question, what do we live for when it seems so dark? And though none is mentioned in our Bible text, I'm quite sure, the same maladies of tragedy, illness, death, and financial worries must have been a part of their daily and personal lives as well. Think about the terror of the crosses hanging outside their towns reminding them each day of the brutal reign of terror of the Romans. As they look around them, there seems to be little or no control over their future. They could feel the 3 D's in a real way as they smell the air of death surrounding where they live.

Here Gabriel greeted this young girl, as one who was favored by God. "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Favored? Facing a stoning, possibly the cancelation of the wedding, having to waddle not even walk at 9mos pregnant to Jerusalem to become a number to the Romans, fleeing to Egypt to save your son from murder, worrying all the time at his adult ministry and then at the end watching that son be crucified. Favored? We too find it impossible to believe that we are favored as we look at what we are going through. What's wrong, where is the hope in our lives...?

You just don't feel God's favor is with you, let me remind you of Ephesians 1:3-4 (NLT), 3 How we praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we belong to Christ. 4 Long ago, even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. 5 His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. And this gave him great pleasure. (Here it is we're highly favored, top draft picks because of His love and His pleasure in us as His children)

Will you remember God's favor is on you? In response to the troubled feelings of Mary, the words "Do not be afraid" spoken by Gabriel came to Mary. Please, please, please, Hear the same as we read the words from the Bible in Ephesians 1: do not be afraid. God's got you. Your future is secure. Christ came this night to shattered the darkness. We are saved, we are forgiven. God is working on the inside out and asks us to Choose to believe that! This is the best gift of Christmas, that God loves me, he is for me, he holds my future, the future does not hold me hostage, no terrorists, NOTHING can separate me from Him! OH, hear the words for you this Christmas "Don't be afraid"!

Tonight, I want to remind you that Mary and not even the angel Gabriel are the heroes of this story. The central figure in our story is the gracious and loving God who gave us his Son, Jesus, whose birth is the promise of God's redeeming love - Emmanuel - "God With Us." And Mary was favored, chosen by God, to play a role in this redemption process. So are we! We are favored by God, to tell the impossible story that God loves the world that He gave His Son to be born of a woman. Remember this as we live in a 3 d world: have faith, loving God and sharing that truth with others.