

Sunday, December 24, 2023

Good News, Great Joy

Week 4: Divine Interruption (Luke 2:8-20)

- For those who are not familiar with my story, I am the youngest in a large family.
- My parents, had a lot of kids, in a very short time span. So they are either super heroes, or completely insane!
- This week, my mom had been listening to our series this month, and said that the surprise pregnancies that we talked about made her think of a surprise pregnancy of her own.
- So this past Monday my mom found a letter, that she had written to her mom on Mother's day 1990 and she sent it in our family group chat.
- At this time, they had a 5 year old daughter, a 4 year old daughter, a 2 year old son, a 10 month old baby boy, while in the process of

following the Lord's call to go plant a church in Northern Ireland

- And it's in this context that my mom writes in her letter:

"Dear Mom: Because of Mother's Day and because you're such a wonderful mom, you have the privilege of being the first to know: You have another grandchild on the way! Now, before you start moaning and rolling your eyes, let me hasten to add that this one was entirely God's idea, and we trust Him. This little person no doubt has a special job for the Lord in store.

I have to admit to not feeling really ready for this yet, and I'm sure you can sympathize with me. But Matt is, of course, thrilled, and promises to do everything he can to make it easy on me. As for the girlies, they began months ago telling us they want another baby!

Sunday, December 24, 2023

I figure I'm only about 3 weeks along, and I think the baby will arrive in mid to late January. Yes, we will be out of the country."

- Mom sent us the picture of this letter, and my softie of a brother responded with crying face emoji's and I responded with a GIF of Shaquille O'Neal saying, "Ready or not, here I come!"
- I ended up getting a little payback, because whenever Rachel and I followed the Lord's call to plant a church, the very weekend that we moved into our house here in Hickory, we found out that Fletcher was coming!
- I don't know what it is about God wanting a legacy in our family of planting churches and having babies at the same time, but God has a way of interrupting our plans and our schedules.
- Whenever we have an idea of the way we think things are going to go, God has a way of throwing a wrench into our plans, and giving new directions.

- I share that with you because:
 - Christmas is the day of Divine Interruption
 - Christmas is the day we celebrate the Child that interrupted history
 - Christmas is the day we celebrate the Child that interrupted satan's rule and reign over this earth
 - Christmas is the day we celebrate the Child that interrupted sins grip on mankind
 - We celebrate the Child that was the most famous baby ever born
 - We celebrate the Child that would change the way the world saw morality
 - We celebrate the Child that changed the way we mark our calendars
 - We celebrate the Child that changed everything
 - The last few weeks we've talked about how this Child interrupted Mary and Joseph's life and plans

- And at His birth, we're going to see another group that get's their every day lives interrupted as well.
- If you look with me in Luke chapter 2, beginning in verse 8: ***“And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!” When the***

angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.” -Luke 2:8-20 (ESV)

- PRAY

- I am an over thinker sometimes, and as a Pastor, I think sometimes you have to be.
- But there are so many things, in the Christmas season that we just kind of take and roll with

because their Christmas traditions, but if we really think about them, they don't make much sense.

- Like the Nativity scenes with the wise men, even though they didn't arrive to see Jesus until He was at least 2 years old.
 - But I get it, they were still a part of the Christmas story, they played a powerful part in the narrative, we want them to be included, it's not a big deal.
- But here's something that really boggles my mind. And it's the song Silent Night.
- Because first off, Mary had a baby with no epidurals, pain medication, or even doctors or mid wives around.
 - Also, Jesus was a human baby, and human babies do not just sleep 8 hours through the night on their first day being brought into the world.
 - You cannot convince me, that this was a silent night for them!

- And then you get to verse 2: Look at these lyrics:

Silent night, Holy night

Shepherds quake at the sight

Glories stream from heaven afar

Christ the Savior is born

Christ the Savior is born

- Soooo, how do you have a silent night, and have shepherd's quaking or trembling at the same time??
- How do you have a silent night, while glories are streaming from Heaven??
- This may have started out as a silent night, but that silent ordinary night gets interrupted and as soon as it turned Holy Night, it became a hectic night
- This was the most wonderfully terrifying night of these shepherds lives.
- But I think so often whenever we think about this scene, we picture it as this cute moment

between this nice angel and a few humble shepherds

- And it's probably because we're used to hearing this story told as a children's story
 - Which isn't a bad thing, but it can kind of take away from the magnitude of the moment
 - Here recently, when we read to Fletcher before bed, I've been trying to stick to the Christmas stories obviously, and here are some of the illustrations that we've seen
 - **Picture 1:** You have this beautiful, glowing, almost florescent lady that captivates the attention of the shepherds
 - **Picture 2:** You got the curly headed red-head angel in the white robe with his backup choir
 - **Picture 3:** Of course, we have the chubby cheek Angel babies
 - And I get that these are all children's books, but I think if we're honest these are accurate

depictions as to how we think about this passage whenever we picture the moment

- However, this is not the way that the bible depicts angels.
 - Now, I don't think at this time these shepherds would have seen something like the Living Creatures with multiple heads, eyes, and wings like described in the book of Ezekiel and Revelation
 - You do see angels in scripture taking on a similar form to humans
 - And I think what Daniel went through in Daniel chapter 10, probably gives us the most accurate insight to what these shepherds would have gone through when this angel showed up.
- Daniel describes an encounter he has with an angel, and he wasn't alone but the other's with him couldn't see the angel but they could feel the presence of the angel, and just feeling that presence made them run away terrified

- But Daniel was left alone seeing this great sight, and this is how he describes it: ***“I looked up and saw a man dressed in linen clothing, with a belt of pure gold around his waist. His body looked like a precious gem. His face flashed like lightning, and his eyes flamed like torches. His arms and feet shone like polished bronze, and his voice roared like a vast multitude of people.”***
-Daniel 10:5-6 (NLT)
 - He goes on to say that when he heard the Angel speak it made him faint, the angel had to pick him up, but he was still trembling so much that he couldn't speak.
- Then he goes on to say, ***“Then the one who looked like a man touched me again, and I felt my strength returning. “Don't be afraid,” he said, “for you are very precious to God. Peace! Be encouraged! Be strong!”***-
Daniel 10: 18-19 (NLT)
- Can you see how similar this encounter is to the one the Shepherd's are going through?
- In verse 9, Luke says, ***“And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear.”*** -***Luke 2:9 (ESV)***
- This term great fear is such a heavy phrase, because first the word translated “great” is the greek word Megas, which is where we get the word Mega..so this is Mega Fear we're talking about
 - And also in the greek, you have two words that are primarily translated as fear.
 - That is phobos and phobeo. We've talked about this before
 - Phobos means: to fear, dread, terror. It is the feeling of fear
 - Phobeo: means to put flight by terrifying. So this is allowing fear to dictate your actions.
- However, in this passage in Luke 2, this term “Great Fear” is ***“And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the***

Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great [megas] fear [phobeo phobos].” -Luke 2:9 (ESV)

- Both words are used at the same time to emphasize the fear that they were going through!
- They not only were filled with the feeling of terror and dread, they also were completely paralyzed with fear and were so afraid they had no control over their bodies!
 - Sounds a lot like what Daniel went through right??
 - This was easily the most terrifying moment of their lives
 - But the Angel also doesn't want them to stay within that fear
- I get chills whenever I read the response of the angel to Daniel when he says, *“Don't be afraid,” he said, “for you are very precious to God. Peace! Be encouraged! Be strong!”- Daniel 10: 18-19 (NLT)*

- But the Angel here has an even greater message for the Shepherds
- He says, ***And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.” -Luke 2:10 (ESV)***
 - That word “Great” in Great Joy is also the word Megas
 - So this is Good news of MEGA JOY
 - The angles wants them to go from Mega Fear to Mega Joy
- Because that's what Jesus does: **JESUS REPLACES GREAT FEAR WITH GREAT JOY**
 - This word Joy in the original language means a calm delight, or the cause or occasion of joy.
 - So Jesus not only brings a calm delight to your soul, He is also the cause for the joy in your life.

Sunday, December 24, 2023

- This is the same word that Jesus uses to say that there will be more joy in heaven over 1 sinner who repents, than 99 persons who need no repentance
- It's the same word that He uses to describe the joy that a mother feels when she first holds her new born child and everything changes for her
- Whenever we come to Christ, this Joy becomes a part of who we are!
 - Now, joy and happy (from the word blessed like we talked about the other week), are not completely separable, but they are not exactly the same either
 - You see because, Joy is a state of being, happiness is an emotional reaction
 - Happiness comes from the root word for happenings
 - Happiness is a natural emotion that we experience whenever something happens to go well
- But Joy is an intrinsic part of our nature in Christ that remains even when things go wrong
- I heard one pastor say that *“Christians are the only people on the planet that can grieve and have joy at the same time.”*
- How is that possible? Because our joy is not rooted in our happenings
- Our Joy is rooted in something so much more sustainable!
 - ***“...the joy of the Lord is your strength.” - Nehemiah 8:10 (ESV)***
 - ***“You make known to me the path of life; in Your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” -Psalm 16:11 (ESV)***
 - ***“For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised...strength and joy are His place.” -1 Chronicles 16: 25, 27 (ESV)***

Sunday, December 24, 2023

- His space, His home, the place He operates in is Joy
- CS Lewis once said, "Joy is the serious business of heaven."
- God takes Joy very seriously, and He went to great lengths to extend to us this great Joy.
- And who is the great Joy available to?
- Well the angel said, ***And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." -Luke 2:10 (ESV)***
- **THIS GOOD NEWS AND GREAT JOY IS FOR EVERYONE**
 - The good news that God became a human is for all people
 - The great joy that His presence brings is available to all people
 - God makes this so evident in the fact that outside of Mary and Joseph, He first announces this news to those who were

- generally excluded, to let them know that, in His Kingdom, they were included
- You see Shepherd's, because of their line of work, they were seen as being ceremonially unclean in the Jewish society
 - Therefore they were excluded from participating in Temple worship
- Because of the 24/7 nature of their work watching over the sheep, they were not able to observe the Sabbath in the way that the religious leaders said you were supposed to, so therefore they were placed under a Rabbinic ban from all religious activities
- In that society they were thought so low of that they were seen as only being one small step above lepers
- They were outcasts, they were marginalized, they were seen as so untrustworthy that they were not allowed to serve as witnesses in court cases

- In our day, we have the saying that someone cusses like a sailor, they would have probably say someone cusses like a Shepherd
- They would have been seen as the least religious people around
- Which is strange because the bible had spoken about shepherds pretty favorably
- Some of their most prominent forefathers had stints of being shepherds
 - Abraham had been a shepherd
 - Moses had been a shepherd
 - David had been a shepherd
 - The prophet Amos was a shepherd
 - Kings were referred to as shepherds of God's people
 - God was referred to as a Shepherd multiple times in the Old Testament
 - And Jesus would refer to Himself as the Good Shepherd
- Even with all of this scripture, shepherds were still outcasts of their society and their places of worship
- It's important for us to remember: we should never be quick to reject those that God is willing to redeem
 - What we may see as simple, God can make significant
 - What we may pass over, God pursues
- Romans 12:11 is very clear that God shows no partiality
- **2 Peter 2:9 "...not willing that ANY should perish but that ALL should come to repentance."**
- **Romans 1:16 "The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation, for ALL who believe"**
- **John 3:16 For God so loved the WORLD, that He gave his only Son, that WHOEVER believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.**

Sunday, December 24, 2023

- There is not a single person on the planet that this Good News and Great Joy is not FOR
 - Now, there are many that won't accept Him, but that doesn't mean the Gospel isn't just as available to them
- And there may be some in this room that can very much relate to the shepherds
 - Maybe you have been marginalized, rejected, hurt, or in some ways outcasted from the church or some sort of religious system
 - And if that's you, I'm so sorry, that does not reflect the heart of our God
 - And I would hope and pray that you would look to Him and His Goodness more than the shortcomings of fallen human beings
 - Because no matter if you have been overlooked or rejected
 - No matter if you have felt like the most unreligious person in the world

- No matter if you have never had a spiritual thought before in your life

- JESUS WAS BORN FOR YOU

- No matter what your background is, no matter if you have a criminal record, no matter how far off you have felt from God in your life, no matter what your past or family background holds
- God gave the gift of His Son, for you
- This is what makes Christmas so amazing and undervalued
 - Because Christmas is more so associated with Santa Claus now-a-days, who makes his list, and checks it twice, and finds out who's been naughty or nice
 - He determines who's been good enough to deserve getting gifts
 - And I'm not here to make a statements or pass judgment on the traditions you decide to observe in your household

Sunday, December 24, 2023

- But I think we can agree that Jesus is better than Santa!
 - Because Jesus comes to give good gifts!
 - Jesus comes, most importantly, to give the gift of Himself to us! And His gift giving is not dependent upon our performance
 - In fact, He gives us the gift of salvation, blessing, and favor despite our performance
- The angel tells these unclean, overlooked, irreligious shepherds, ***“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” -Luke 2:11 (ESV)***
 - This is what separates Christianity and the message of Jesus from every other religion on the planet
 - Because every other religion is all about all of the things you need to do
 - They are all about the systems, customs, and traditions that you need to keep up with in order to try and make your way to some sort of Higher Power
- But the reality is there was nothing you could ever do to get to God, so God came to you, in the Person of Jesus Christ
- Like the old song says, “I once was lost, but now I’m found”
- Make no mistake, you don’t find God, God finds you
- And He offers you the Good News and Great Joy THAT He has come and WHO He has come to be for you
- The angel is very clear He is Savior, Christ, the Lord
 - Not just a Lord, He is THE Lord
 - Literally, the master, the One who has the power of deciding
 - This is not just a title of respect He is being given, this is a declaration that He is God
 - He is The Lord, He is Christ: The Messiah, the Anointed One of God, come to do what no one else could ever do

- and He is **Savior**, can also be translated as **Deliverer**

- First and foremost, Gabriel was very clear with Joseph (that we talked about last week), that Jesus has come to save us and deliver us from sin
- Sin: every lie, every bad deed, every bit of selfishness, every shortcoming, fault, and failure that we have ever had in our lives, separated us from God
 - He is Holy, He cannot be in the presence of sin
- It gave us the eternal sentence of guilty, and the penalty for it was death and eternal separation from God
- But that Baby Boy, born in Bethlehem would grow up to deliver us from that sentence
- He would deliver us from the sin we could not escape, and He would use a cross to bridge the gap of separation from us and God forever.

- He delivers us from condemnation and offers us communion with God

- He delivers us from depression and offers us deep significance in the Kingdom of God

- He delivers us from fear and offers us freedom

- He delivers us from chaos and offers us a King

- He delivers us from oppression and offers us His presence

- He delivers us from the weariness of this life and offers us rest for our souls

- And the final enemy He delivers us from is death, because He died in our place, and defeated the grave we can confidently say like Paul when he quoted the prophet: **“Death is swallowed up in victory.” “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”-1 Corinthians 15:55 (ESV)**

Sunday, December 24, 2023

- He is your Savior, He is your Deliverer
 - And you may not choose to accept His salvation, but that doesn't change the fact that He is still Savior
 - You and I's opinions will never change who He is
- That's why Paul writes to Timothy and says, ***“For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.”-1 Timothy 4:10 (ESV)***
 - The only ones who will be saved are the ones that recognize that they need a Savior
 - Whenever we come to the realization that we can't save ourselves, we can't be our own God, we can't fix ourselves....we need God.
 - But if we refuse to recognize our need to be saved, if we reject His offer for salvation, He is still Savior, whether you accept Him or not
 - But for those who do Accept Him, for all those who receive Him, we get the right to

be called children of God, we experience the Good News and Great Joy of Peace with God and Eternal security.

- That's why Jesus was born! That's why the multitude of Angels show up, to declare: ***“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!” -Luke 2:14 (ESV)***
 - The question is who is God pleased with? How do you please God?
 - There is only one way to please God, and it's not through doing enough good deeds or less bad deeds. It's not from singing the right songs or attending enough services. It's not giving enough money away or obtaining some sort of status.
 - The only way to please God, is to accept His Son. And Colossians tells us that once we accept Jesus, our lives are then Hidden in Christ

Sunday, December 24, 2023

- That means now when God looks at you, He doesn't see your sins and your faults and your failures, He not only sees the Perfection of His Son, with whom He is well pleased.
- And if we accept Him, and are hidden in Him, then the promise is that we will experience Peace on this earth.
- And you will experience the most Peace when God is most glorified in your life.
- *Giving Glory to God in the Highest, results in Peace among those who have accepted God's Son.*
- That word **Peace** means: ***The tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and content with its earthly lot, of whatsoever sort that is***
- You see when you have the Peace of God in your life, no matter how hurtful, difficult, or backwards this world gets, you still can have a calmly happy, tranquil soul, because you

know that this world is not your home, this life is just a vapor, and the sufferings of this present world are not worth comparing to the Glory that will be revealed to us

- Because whenever we have the Peace of God, we are no longer filled with Great Fear, but we have Great Joy
 - Knowing that THE LORD HAS COME to us
 - The KING IS HERE for you
 - All because that Baby was Born in Bethlehem
- So come on, let's stand to our feet! Let's sing and give Him Glory in the Highest! Let's sing about this Good News and Great Joy available to us! That this Christmas season is all about!