

## Christmas In Shades Of Blue

1. Warm-up Question: Jeff mentioned that Dollywood Theme Park has over 5 million Christmas lights. What's the most stunning Christmas display you've ever seen?
2. Read Luke 2:21-35. Simeon's prophecy was full of good words about how great Mary and Joseph's son was going to be. But then came the ominous last two verses.
  - a. "This child is destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel." What do you think that meant?
  - b. "This child is destined . . . to be a sign that will be opposed, so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed." What do you think that meant?
  - c. "A sword will pierce your own soul too." What do you think that meant?
  - d. Note the very last word "too." "Too" means "also," implying that Mary was not the only one who would experience pain like a piercing sword. Who's the other person Simeon expects to experience great pain?
  - e. How do you imagine these last words of Simeon affected Mary? What might she have been thinking and feeling?
  - f. Suppose you walked into church on a Sunday with your infant child and an old man told you that your child was destined for greatness – that he or she would rule over many people, be a light to the world, and bring life to multitudes. But suppose he then went on to say that your child would, in the process, suffer greatly – and that you too would vicariously experience great pain. Upon hearing all this, how would you feel? Would you be glad or sad?
3. Jeff said, "When you think about it, what was true for baby Jesus is, on a less cosmic scale, true for every child born into the world. Even as we celebrate the birth of a child and her potential for greatness and all the wonderful moments her life will bring, we also know that she will suffer greatly – and that she too will someday die. Nobody gets out of here without a lot of suffering."
  - a. If God gave you the option to erase all the suffering from your child's life – or at least the worst suffering – would you do it? Suppose God offered you the same option for your own life – to remove the worst suffering. Would you? Why or why not?
  - b. Suppose God gave Mary the option to erase all the suffering from Jesus' life and she took it. Would Jesus have been better off? Would she? Would we?
  - c. As Jesus was taken down from the cross and Mary held his lifeless body for the last time, what do you imagine she was experiencing? If at that moment she was

given the option to reversed it all and saved Jesus from the cross, Jeff imagined her saying, “No, no. Let it be.” Do you buy that? Is that how you see her?

4. From all this – the somber side of the story of Christmas – we can learn a profound lesson of faith and life. Great beauty often rises from great pain. Life’s suffering gives us the chance to paint in the rich dark tones of the color spectrum – dark gray, deep purple, and midnight blue.
  - a. They say great art often arises out of great pain – e.g., Robin Williams, Whitney Houston, Vincent Van Gogh. Do you agree? If so, why is it that pain often gives rise to great art?
  - b. By age 47, Beethoven lost all hearing. He was devastated and depressed, but pushed through and thereafter wrote his greatest symphony – Beethoven’s Ninth. How do you imagine Beethoven felt when he lost his hearing? Where do you suppose he found the strength to push on?
  - c. Jeff told how he had a beautiful goodbye moment with their cat Miss Girl, holding her for 45 minutes as she rested in his arms not long before her death. He said it’s a moment he will always cherish. In your own life, when have you encountered great beauty amidst great suffering?
5. Jesus lived his entire life knowing that eventually he would suffer greatly on the cross. But he embraced his life as it was. He let it be. He accepted his destiny, embraced it, redeemed it, and ultimately triumphed over it.
  - a. Jesus said, “If any want to become my followers, let them . . . take up their cross daily and follow me.” Luke 9:23. What do you think that means?
  - b. Romans 8:17 says, “We suffer with Christ so that we may also be glorified with him.” What do you think that means?
  - c. Romans 6:5 says, “If we have been united with Christ in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” What do you think that means?
  - d. When we stand before Jesus at the last judgment, Allan Boesak suggests the first thing Jesus will say to us is, “Show me your wounds.” What do you think that means?
  - e. If Jesus said that to you, what story or experience from your own life would be your first response?
  - f. Based on all we’ve discussed, in your view how should a follower of Jesus respond to suffering?

***Join us on Sunday to help us meet and exceed our 300 attendance goal! We need you!***