

Birthing Jesus

On Sunday, we launched a Christmas sermon series called “Finding Ourselves In The Christmas Story.” We began with “The Enunciation” – where an angel tells Mary about the child she will bear.

1. Warm up questions. Christmas surrounds us with all kinds of warm, familiar rituals. Let’s think about some of them.
 - a. What’s your favorite – or least favorite – Christmas song?
 - b. What’s your favorite Christmas movie or special?
 - c. Why do you like to watch the same movie or special, or hear the same Christmas song, over and over again?
2. The Biblical Christmas stories are kind of like our favorite Christmas TV specials or songs. They contain such powerful, inspirational messages, we benefit from revisiting them over and over again, so their truths become embedded in our lives. In that spirit, let’s re-read Luke 1:26-38.
 - a. Galilee was considered a remote backwater region, far from the holy city of Jerusalem. Nazareth was a tiny, hole-in-the-wall village. And Mary was an obscure teenager. Why do you suppose God chose have the Christmas story unfold that way? What’s the lesson for us?
 - b. If Jesus were being born into the world today, whom do you think God would choose to be the mother and where might she live?
 - c. In verse 28, we’re told that Mary was perplexed by the words of greeting spoken by the angel. Why? What do you suppose she found so perplexing?
 - d. Suppose an angel appeared to you and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you!” What would you think? How would you feel?
 - e. In the movie “Simon Birch,” Simon tells his minister, “I think I’m God’s instrument. God’s going to use me to carry out a plan.” Would you say that about yourself? Why or why not?
3. If we’re all special in God’s eyes, if we’re all here on a mission to accomplish special purposes, that raises the question: How am I supposed to figure out what my special purposes are? Jeff suggested we’ll find the answer in the same way Mary did, *i.e.*, through experiences in life that surprise us with unexpected opportunities.
 - a. When Mary was a child and someone asked, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” What would you guess she might have said?

- b. When you were growing up, what did you say you wanted to become? Has your life unfolded the way you expected? What has surprised you? Do you see divine meaning in those surprises?
 - c. Jeff told about a little boy who saw a disabled person fall on the beach and rushed to help, even as his Dad pretended to look the other way. All of us experience these kinds of small Mary Moments, where we're suddenly thrust into a situation where we can respond as God's instrument or take a pass. Have you had any of these small Mary Moments recently? What happened?
 - d. Rabbi Zeb Zusya [ZOO-ss-yuh] said, "In the world to come, I shall not be asked, 'Why were you not Moses?' I shall be asked, 'Why were you not Zusya?'" Does this quote speak to you? If so, how?
 - e. Jeff said, "Like Mary before us, in each of our lives we will experience certain critical "calling moments" – moments when it suddenly becomes clear that we have an opportunity to do something important for God. You're not going to be able to predict those moments. They'll just happen. So stop trying to figure it all out in advance, and just be alert and ready." What's the biggest Mary Moment you've ever experienced?
4. In verse 33, as the angel describes Jesus, he tells Mary that "of his kingdom there will be no end." In other words, Jesus was being sent to establish an unending kingdom. Often we tend to think of that kingdom as existing only in the future, when we get to heaven. But Jesus seemed to view it as both a future and present reality. Jesus spoke often of the "kingdom of God" and "kingdom of heaven" as being something he was starting back then that would just keep going and growing from that point forward, through the years and into eternity. Viewed this way, the "kingdom of God" exists any place, large or small, where Jesus is allowed to rule and God's will reigns supreme. That means we can encounter the Kingdom of God in a moment in time, or a relationship, or a church, or a workplace, or a group of friends, or on a missions trip or ministry team, etc., etc.
- a. Tell us about a time or place when you feel you've experienced a taste of the Kingdom of God.
 - b. Jeff said, "Each one of us has exactly the same calling as God gave Mary. God has put you here to be someone through whom Jesus is birthed into the situations of life you encounter. If you are willing, the Spirit of Christ will be conceived in you, and God will use you to birth Jesus into the corner of the world you inhabit." Tell us about a situation happening in your life right now that you feel called to birth Jesus into. What might it look like for you to birth Jesus into that situation?

*In this Advent Season, may we all embrace our call to be like Mary,
birthing Jesus in our own little corner of the world.*