

They Didn't Look the Part

1. Warm up: What's your all-time favorite TV Christmas special – and why?
2. On Sunday we re-lived the Biblical Christmas story through the eyes of Mary, the Magi, the shepherds, and the angel Gabriel, then Pastor Jeff shared a brief meditation. Let's talk about each of the dramatic monologues, then turn to Jeff's meditation. Here are several of the key thoughts in Mary's monologue:
 - a. Mary said, "I've often wondered what it would be like to stand here, in this time and space, in this world so many years after I waked this earth." How do you think Mary would feel is she saw the state of our world today and the state of the church movement her Son came to initiate?
 - b. When Gabriel told Mary, "You will conceive and bear a son. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High," Mary said, "Imagine what the weight of those words felt like, the joy mingled with fear." Try to imagine yourself in Mary's shoes in that moment. What would you have feared? What would have caused you to rejoice?
 - c. Mary talked about what she felt when she held her son for the first time. For those who are parents, what did you think and feel when you held your first child for the first time?
 - d. After making some observations about the state of our world today, Mary asked us to ponder, "What would my Son do in your world today?" How would you answer?
3. The shepherd's monologue:
 - a. The shepherd said, "The shame of being told I was unclean for my entire life had worn me down to where at times I believed I really was dirty, from the inside out. My soul was so troubled by all this that I wished I could go to sleep and die, then wake up in heaven with my flock around me." Have you ever felt so low you wished you could go to sleep and not wake up? What brought you so low?
 - b. The shepherd described what it was like when he arrived at the manger and saw baby Jesus. Transport yourself there in your imagination. What would you have felt in that moment if you had been part of the manger scene?
 - c. After what transpired, the shepherds began telling everyone what they'd experienced. In his monologue, the shepherd said, "We had good news to tell, and God had chosen us to be the messengers." Do you see yourself the same way? Why or why not? Are you sharing the good news? If so, how?

4. The Magi's monologue:

- a. The Magi said, "King Herrod and his priests had also seen the event in the sky, but missed the significance. They were not looking for a sign." He went on to say, "For those of you that are still searching for a sign, there is hope. There are signs of the divine happening all around you." Why is it so easy to miss the signs God gives us? Tell us about a time in your life when you feel God gave you a sign.
- b. The Magi said, "This baby changed how I see everything. I was called out of my religious observance into a spiritual walk." How has Jesus changed your life?

5. Gabriel's monologue:

- a. Gabriel noted that God chose to give both humans and angels free will – the ability to choose – then added, "The choices each of us makes can lead to wonderful, positive outcomes, or negative, potentially destructive ones." Many humans and many angels have made destructive choices. So why do you think God chose to give us free will?
- b. Gabriel said, "If Jesus was going to restore humanity's relationships with God, would Jesus also reconcile the angelic beings who had fallen away? The birth of Jesus gave me hope for ALL of creation's redemption!" Do you think it's possible that fallen angels could also be redeemed – that God's grace could restore them to?

6. In his meditation, Jeff noted that God made some startling casting decisions when choosing which humans who were to play starring roles in the Christmas drama. Each of the people God chose – Mary, the Magi, and the shepherds – would have been considered unworthy in the eyes of others and probably even in their own eyes. Mary was a 14-year-old peasant girl, not a daughter of noble birth. The Magi were pagan Zoroastrian priest who practiced the "dark arts." And the shepherds were part of a profession widely considered dishonest and immoral. Read Luke 1:8-18, as printed on p. 3.

- a. Luke 1:48 gives us a glimpse into how Mary saw herself. She says, "God has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant." In other words, she considered herself "lowly" and thus unworthy of such a high calling. Have you ever considered yourself unworthy to be used by God to do great things? Tell us about it.
- b. I Corinthians 1:28 says, "God [chooses] what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God [chooses] what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are." Why does God choose to work that way? And what are the implications of that for you and me?
- c. Jeff said, "Whoever you are, there's hope for you. Get over yourself. God wants you. God needs you. There are things God wants to happen that only you can do. God has put out a casting call for the next batch of unlikely characters who will carry the sacred story forward." What's something of sacred importance that you sense God's calling you to do right now? Are you rising to meet the challenge?

Luke 1:8-18

⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴²and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'

⁴⁶ And Mary said,

'My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸ for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

⁵⁰ His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.

⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;

⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,

⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.'