

## Monday, December 1, 2008

The last lap of the journey of 2008 begins...Advent. It's "the anticipation factor", as over these next 30 days, we anticipate God's involvement in Christmas, the conclusion of this convulsive year, and transition into 2009. Our theme: "The Magnificent Mystery", is an invitation to consider the deep mystery of God's visit to our planet in the person of Jesus, the mystery of what He accomplished here, and the deeper mystery of what happens in a person like you or me when we trust Jesus to be our Savior and Lord.

This week, the first week of Advent, we consider HOPE...the "anticipation factor". From the beginning, God has been THE source of hope. According to John 1 & Genesis 1, before there was anything, God was...and because He was, HOPE existed, even before the universe, or earth or humanity...HOPE! Why? Because with God "all things are possible", at all times, in all situations! Right?

After God had created it all, He declared "it is VERY good"! (Gen. 1:31) In that moment HOPE reigned, because God and only things God had created existed! Soon, "very good" turned to turmoil, as Satan began to disrupt God's world. "Did God really say?" The rebel, expelled from heaven, had one purpose...undermine God and His purposes at all times! Hope died...or so it seemed, as Adam and Eve both turned from their hope filled relationship with God to rebellion, and found themselves overwhelmed with fear, shame, and guilt. It's our pain too, isn't it...when we turn away, hope fades. Read Genesis 1,2 & 3. Look carefully at God's design and the ebb/flow of Hope in response to the relationship He designed us for with Him.

With God...HOPE is always possible. Note His declaration of war against Satan in Genesis 3:15..."He (Jesus) will crush your (Satan) head, and you will strike His heel." It meant Jesus would deal Satan a fatal and condemning blow by His perfect earthly life, His sacrificial death, His resurrection and His return to sovereign reign. HOPE awakened, and great possibilities again flourished with Jesus! Read John 1, watch the ebb/flow of HOPE.

## Tuesday, December 2, 2008

Who is the dear friend you can count on to awaken HOPE in you? Have you noticed how often God INITIATES Hope by reaching into a desperate situation with His stunning INVITATION? Have you noticed God rarely simply solves the problem...rather He opens a door for you to step through, and as you do, your problem finds resolution.

Abraham had to leave his homeland, follow God's lead to Canaan, and accept a miracle son Isaac rather than chart his own course, in order for God's Magnificent Mystery to begin for the Hebrew people. (Gen. 12-50) Moses had to return to face Pharaoh, then challenge the Hebrew slaves to slaughter a lamb and put the blood on the outside of their doorposts, for all to see, including the angel of death... Passover, freedom through the Red Sea! (Exodus 3-20) The Bible is one grand story after another, of God reaching (initiating) to normal folks like you and me, caught in the quagmire of life, inviting us to engage with Him in His much larger purpose in our world. As we do, have you noticed we find ourselves getting free from the hope killing things in which we so easily entangle ourselves. It's Hebrews 12:1,2!

Luke 1 opens the New Testament chronologically. 4 centuries elapse between Malachi and Luke, during which time empires rise and fall, generations pass, and hope seems lost for the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who consider themselves God's chosen people. Rituals continued at the Temple, but there was no indication God was listening or cared! Where is your hope when heaven seems silent?

Look carefully at Luke 1, watch how God initiates Hope to Zechariah, Elizabeth and Mary, inviting them to participate with Him in His eternal redemptive plan. Consider their response in view of this: "*when God initiates hope, your response reveals the reality of your relationship with God.*" How did they each respond? What does that tell you about their relationship with God? The "Magnificent Mystery" of Christmas, challenged everyone to engage the impossible. Those who did experienced God's Hope revived!

## Wednesday, December 3, 2008

How long does Hope last? What awakens hope in you, what kills hope? From Genesis 3:15, God's first declaration of a hope plan which would defeat the hope killer Satan, and provide a path to hope for every person...to the visit of Gabriel inviting Zechariah (Luke 1) to begin the "Magnificent Mystery" count-down to the incarnation of God... was a very long time. Frequently hope seemed lost as people concluded God had given up. Look at it from God's perspective...would it be fair to say the earthly evidence was that mankind had given up on God? Generation after generation turned away from God. Have you noticed, when we turn away from God we don't turn to nothing... we turn to something to replace God. Consider Jeremiah 2 or 5, or Romans 1. That's God's perspective! If accurate, what would be an appropriate response from Majestic, Holy, Sovereign God considering His perfect creation plan? Genesis 6 & 7 or 19?

Consider Judges 2:6-3:11, where you'll find God's overview of the "Judges cycle" of blessing, apathy, rebellion, discipline, repentance, forgiveness, blessing. For several generations this was the "cycle" of life for God's people! Here's an important question...where do you see December 2008 and God's American people, Walworth County Christians, in this cycle? What can we expect will be God's next response to our recent past and present position?

Part of the "Magnificent Mystery" is something called MERCY! It's when deserved punishment is not executed... rather, in love, HOPE is offered!! In Luke 1:11-17, note Gabriel's hope/mercy message to faithful Zechariah: "many of the people of Israel will he (John) bring back to the Lord their God..." That suggests 'many' have rejected God, even fathers turning away from their families, and children rejecting their parents! MERCY is God's "magnificent mystery" response to our rebellion. Romans 5:8 & 1 John 4:9,10 declare God's love driven hope to a rebellious world in the living Mercy person of Jesus! How do you respond today? Consider Psalm 51 & 147:11, is that you?

Thursday, December 4, 2008

Tonight and tomorrow are the Women's Christmas Advent Dinners. Several hundred women, the majority of them invited guests, will gather at Calvary for a special evening of music, drama, fine dinner and friendship. The "Magnificent Mystery" of God's love for the women of Walworth County will be clearly presented in hopes some will trust Jesus to be their Savior...I'm asking you to pray for a moving of God's Spirit! Will you?

This week we've seen that God INITIATES Hope, often when we least expect it, as He reaches to us at our point of need. Also, God's response to our rejection of Him is Mercy, as He offers hope rather than condemnation! Today, consider what God does when He finds someone ready, even anxious to participate with Him in what He would like to do in our world!! Consider again Luke 1.

While Zechariah was understandably skeptical of angel Gabriel's mysterious message, he was a willing participant in God's preposterous plan. Can you imagine, in his inability to speak, he explained the mystery to Elizabeth and note his first words when finally speech was restored to him (Luke 1:57-64). Look at the outpouring of praise from Zechariah (Luke 1:67-79). We can assume for as long as he lived, he took seriously the role of "mentoring" his miracle son, John the forerunner.

Elizabeth and Mary also both willingly responded to God's invitation to be part of the "Magnificent Mystery". What do you conclude about their experience in Luke 1? Do you see HOPE awakening in both of them, even though the path God asked them to walk was staggering. And what about Joseph in Matthew 1 & 2?

2 Chronicles 16:9 "the eyes of the LORD roam throughout the whole earth looking to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him" is a "want ad" from God... seeking those who will join Him in what some may see as preposterous, "God sized" hope, awakening events! Do you notice in Luke 1:65 how it affected the people?

Friday, December 5, 2008

Have you noticed both HOPE and DESPAIR are contagious? Some would say the recent global economic meltdown is to some degree an emotional Tsunami wave of despair that runs around the globe as each regional trading market responds to the other.

I believe God's design is that His people will be contagiously HOPEFUL because of HIM! The Bible is the account of His offer of Hope to us, regardless of our circumstances, our feelings, or our response to Him.

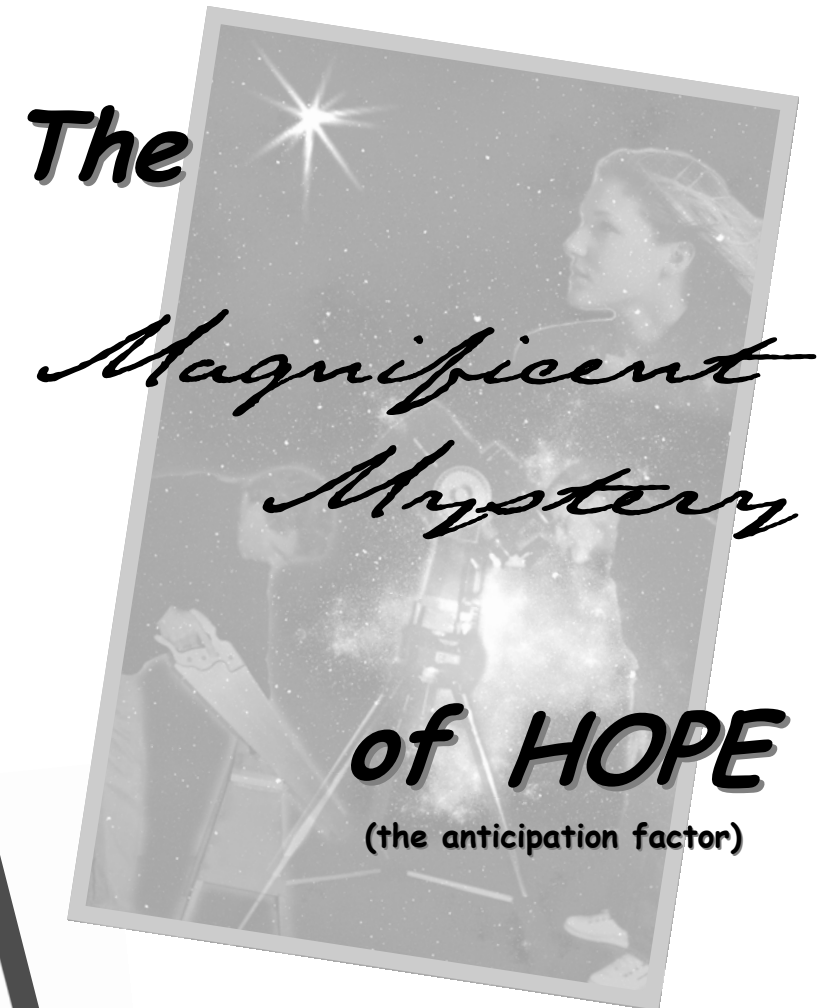
As Dr. Luke completes his first chapter, there are ripples of contagious hope running across Israel... a miracle boy John has been born, announced as the forerunner of Messiah. The "anticipation factor" kicked into high gear! The problem is...no one could imagine who Messiah might be or how he might identify himself, or what he'd be like? Luke 2, of course, is God's announcement that the "Magnificent Mystery" was bringing Messiah..."today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you, He is Christ the Lord." For Jews it could not be clearer! It had to be Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). He had to be from David's line (Isaiah 7:13,14 & 9:6,7).

Luke 2 & Matthew 2 give us the opportunity to evaluate how the world responded to the news of God's "Magnificent Mystery". The more I think of that phrase, the more I appreciate it! Rome, of course, was high on "Magnificent"! Their road and communication systems connected the world. Their military was spectacular and kept law and order world-wide. Their culture dominated the world. Some considered their Caesar a god. But from God's perspective Rome was yet one more temporary human kingdom splashing in the puddle of earth time and humanity. God, however, was stepping into our "puddle" in His "Magnificent Mystery", ready to change everything, offering HOPE which was so elusive for most everyone. In many ways this Christmas it isn't much different is it? How are you responding to God's HOPE available to you and how are you helping a world in turmoil know of God's hope offer?



Pastor Doug Anderson

December 1-5, 2008



A Disciplemaking Tool

DEEPER

Calvary  
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