

MONDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2009

This is Christmas week! Oh, I hope you don't miss a moment of what God would like you to experience with Him! Luke 2:1-7 sets the stage for what we celebrate this week. The distance Joseph walked and Mary probably rode a donkey was about 60 miles. In some places it is very rough terrain, and there would have been many travelers along narrow trails. There would have been no way for Joseph to send ahead for an 'inn reservation', nor did they have any friends or relatives in Bethlehem to receive them. Can you feel their anxiety and exhaustion as they approach over-crowded Bethlehem? With each "no" Joseph received when seeking shelter, you can well imagine his increased frustration with "God's wonderful plan".

Are you learning to see God and His Majesty, even in the difficult times of your life? Last week and this we've been considering the truth that Christmas is a "bridge" that God built from His throne room to earth, from Him to you. It's a living bridge for it is Jesus Christ, Immanuel, "God with us". The purpose of the bridge is to bring God to humanity, so we can know God, understand God's love for humanity, our need for a Savior, and experience the life change which happens when we step onto the bridge and the relationship with God for which we've each been designed begins to develop...authentically.

The first step for us in that process is a TRUTH step. We must come to agreement with God about Who He is, who we are, the sin separation between us and the harsh reality that nothing can bridge that separation except Jesus Christ, God in the flesh. I believe Mary probably understood much better than Joseph, for she had spent 3 months with Zechariah and Elizabeth, I presume studying and discussing the Scriptures regarding God's plan for a Savior for our world. The fact that Joseph had a small business, he was likely not privileged to much Torah study. Yet it's clear he was a man of great faith in God and obedient to all God asked of him. The TRUTH is our "anchor for the soul" in times of frustration, anxiety this Christmas. I invite you: begin a Truth List...brief statements which outline your most important, foundational life truths. Use the Christmas story as a starting point.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2009

Today, consider Matthew 2 and the critical decisions Joseph had to make, actions he had to take, which defined the rest of his life and charted his life course. What do you see?

Yesterday I suggested the first major step onto the bridge God has built from Himself to us is TRUTH agreement with God. The second is RESPONSE to the true identity of Jesus. As Joseph responded obediently to the first message of the angel and took Mary as his wife rather than ending their engagement, he chose a path of protecting and mentoring a miraculous baby which the angel claimed was Immanuel, "God with us". The Bible does not tell us much about the relationship between Joseph and Jesus, but this we know...Joseph took very seriously his role as husband to Mary and provider/protector for infant Jesus.

In Matthew 2, clearly both Herod and the visiting Magi were convinced of Jesus' identity as the long awaited, God sent Messiah. No other decision in your lifetime is more important than this...WHO is Jesus Christ and how do you respond to His identity? Last week, I showed you in John 8:24 and 3:16-18 that "no decision" about Jesus is, in fact, a decision. The truth is, we are born with a sin nature, and soon enough that nature begins expressing itself in rebellion against God. Jesus is God's ONLY provision for correcting that natural problem we all have! (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Luke 2:11) By agreeing with God's assessment of our sinful separation (confess), and turning from our sin rebellion to God (repent), then believing Jesus is really God and able to pay the full price for our sin (belief), and finally placing our full trust in God's promise to forgive our sin and save us from condemnation, any person can enter into the new relationship with God for which we are designed...it's the purpose of the bridge of Christmas! That's is how one becomes a Christian.

Have you experienced this multi-faceted life changing transformation? It re-defines you from enemy of God (Col. 1:21) to son or daughter of God (John 1:12). It should re-define your world-view, now seeing every aspect of life as God sees it! It draws you into a living relationship with God! Is it you?

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2009

Christmas is now only hours away. I beg you to make necessary choices to slow down your life, "BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD", remember our theme verse from Psalm 46:10, two years ago? Don't let busyness rob you of the wonder of the next 48 hours!

Luke 2:8-20 is that powerful, miraculous, human race rescuing event! Note please the statement of the angels in their announcement to the shepherds: "**Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests.**" (Luke 2:14).

The bridge from heaven to earth, from God's throne room to sinful humanity, from God Himself to you and me and each individual person...finally touched earth! God came here in the person of Jesus Christ, God in the flesh.

While the work of God as recorded in the Bible is phenomenal, beginning with creation...NOTHING compares to the magnitude of the Incarnation of God, the birth of Jesus! While angels have come here many times before, the visiting "heavenly host" filled the night sky to be sure humanity didn't miss or mis-understand the most significant event in all history.

"**Glory to God in the highest!**"! What does it mean? It's a declaration, and invitation! The angels declared the event in Bethlehem, the announcement of the angel just made (Luke 2:10,11), was bringing tremendous honor to God in His majestic, highest place of sovereign reign over all creation! While down through history many things had happened in or around Bethlehem and Jerusalem (only 6 miles north), which demonstrated God's power or love or holiness or purpose...this event combined all those at their highest level, and for the first time, established a bridge to God upon which mankind could travel establishing a true, sin-forgiven relationship with God!

May I suggest that you and I have the privilege of living our lives in response to Christmas, by living "glory to God in the highest"! Think about it...living in relationship with Jesus means every word, every attitude, every decision is either "glory to God in the highest" or glory to ME! You and I were designed by God to find our greatest fulfillment in life when living for His glory!

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2009

It's Christmas Eve...three services tonight at Calvary. 5:00 p.m. for young children and their families. Lots of fun, lots of kids, bring your cameras and enjoy Christmas through the eyes of children.

Our 6:30 p.m. service is for adults who love the "heritage" of Christmas. Carols and great songs of Christmas, advent candle and a quieter worship service of contemplation. 8:30 p.m. will be fresh, creative, and a contemporary perspective of Christmas. Come to one or all...but I urge you not to miss the privilege you have of worshipping Jesus Christ this Christmas Eve, as the angels, the shepherds, Mary and Joseph and even the Magi did.

This week we've been looking closely at Matthew 1, 2 and Luke 2, specifically Luke 2:8-20. Today consider the second phrase in the angelic hosts' announcement: "**Peace on earth**" (Luke 2:14). From the first family, Adam and Eve and their sons, "peace" has eluded us hasn't it? In fighting, war, genocide, ethnic cleansing...man's inhumanity to man has been astonishing! Metal detectors at schools, security cameras at work, filters on computers, the never-ending cry for "more police" on streets of every city in America, and of course American military personnel deployed on every continent of our world...what does it all mean? Peace is violently elusive, that's what it means!

Do you agree...this is what the angels declared? . . .

- When humans behave in a way that brings "glory to God in the highest" there will automatically be "peace on earth"...everytime!
- When Jesus Christ is honored as "Immanuel", 'God with us', He will lead humans to living "glory to God in the highest" and humanity will have "peace on earth"!
- When I live my life with "glory to God" as my highest value and my life priority, then my life is fulfilling its God given role in my world!
- When a group of Christ followers, God's people, the Church, live "glory to God in the highest" corporately, then we as a people will bring "peace on earth" unlike anything else we could possibly attempt.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2009

Finally...it's Christmas Day. Find a way to enjoy the wonder, the miracle of this day...all day, from the moment you awaken, to the time you finally fall asleep. Play lots of Christmas music, spend some time thanking God with all your heart, for what HE did on this day so many years ago, as He built the bridge Immanuel, "God with us", to earth, to you! And re-read the Christmas story, Luke 2, one more time...listening to what God wants to say to you in a fresh, new way this Christmas.

One last time, look closely at what the angelic host proclaimed "**Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests.**" (Luke 2:14)

"Peace to men on whom His favor rests" is a remarkable statement! From Adam's first breath, it has been God's passion to pour out "His favor" upon humanity, made in His image! Our spectacular planet, the wonder of the universe we can see, the privilege of life, the beauty of shared love...it's all "God's favor" poured out upon us. But oh, doesn't our too often response of ingratitude, rebellion, selfishness, self-destruction etc. so greatly disappoint you? Reading through history before that Bethlehem miracle...our world was a violent, immoral, terrible place, and yet rather than destroying it, God built a bridge to it, and actually came to live here with us, in our mess!

Amazing, isn't it, that the completion of the bridge was so difficult...a census causing Jesus' birth in an animal stable / an angry king causing death to children in Bethlehem and forcing Joseph and Mary to flee in the middle of the night to Egypt / refugee life in Egypt until that king finally died / return to live in Nazareth, the place of shame for Mary as her hometown! Yet God had proclaimed "Peace on earth to men on whom His favor rests"! Why does humanity insist on making peace so difficult?

Could I invite you to an experiment with me? What would you need to change in order to become a "peacemaker"? Could it work for a week, a month, all of 2010? Let's ask God to empower us to live His peace, and to extend His peace and His favor to as many others as possible this next year!?! WOW!



Pastor Doug Anderson

DECEMBER 21 - 25, 2009



behold
&
believe

THE TRANSFORMATION



A Disciplemaking Tool
DIGGING
DEEPER



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