

## 12-1-19 ~~THE QUESTIONS OF CHRISTMAS~~

**"HOW CAN I BE SURE?" (Can I trust God?)**

**"WHY ME?" (Handling undeserved hardship or blessing?)**

HAPPY NEW YEAR!!!!

Today is the official beginning of a NEW LITURGICAL-CHURCH YEAR.

Today, begins a season that over the past 2,000 years the church has become known as ADVENT --- the 4 weeks leading up to CHRISTMAS --- a time intended to be a time of PREPARATION and ANTICIPATION for the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies that the MESSIAH would come to SAVE all God's children.

A time when we emphasize and reflect upon the HOPE, LOVE, JOY, & PEACE of CHRISTMAS ... hence, we will use the decoration of an ADVENT WREATH to help remind us to reflect upon the HOPE, LOVE, JOY, and PEACE that JESUS THE CHRIST brought to the world over 2000 years ago AND who offers today, to all who CHOOSE to BELIEVE in HIM & HIS MESSAGE... that special HOPE, LOVE, JOY & PEACE OF CHRISTMAS --- PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE!

Actually, as we will see ... JESUS is a lot more than just 'the SAVIOR'- Jesus is GOD HIMSELF --- GOD INCARNATE --- GOD wrapped in human flesh and human form. No other world religion asserts that GOD ALMIGHTY comes to live with and to help humanity as Jesus did – to help the world to do what it could not , otherwise do for itself....to OVERCOME the POWER of SIN AND DEATH!!!!

During this ADVENT season we're going to consider 6 questions that we find in the Bible's telling of the time surrounding the birth of the baby JESUS. In this biblical context we'll come to learn some of the personalities and characters that God used in this context AND we'll ask ourselves the same questions --- comparing how the biblical characters responded SO THAT WE may be challenged to consider how we might respond today.

## The questions of CHRISTMAS --- the questions that we'll be considering are:

1. **"HOW CAN I BE SURE?"** Zechariah essentially asks God's angel, "CAN I TRUST GOD?" (Luke 1:18)
2. **"WHY AM I SO BLESSED?"** Elizabeth asks, "WHY ME?" – we'll consider: HOW WE ARE TO RESPOND TO UNDESERVED HARDSHIP OR BLESSING? (Luke 1:43)
3. **"WHAT AM I TO DO?"** – is the implied question asked by Joseph – engaged to Mary, yet facing all the questions and uncertainties that are swirling around him as he processes Mary's pregnancy. Should he follow "the LAW" --- or what? And how could he still 'love her.' We'll consider: "WHAT ARE WE TO DO WHEN OUR WORLD IS TURNED UPSIDE DOWN?" (Matthew 1:18-25)
4. **"WHAT WILL THIS CHILD BECOME?"** John the Baptist was born to be a mighty prophet of God – like Elijah! Zechariah and Elizabeth ponder all the uncertainties of being a parent raising a child in wild & crazy times. And today, we ask, 'WHAT IS OUR CHILD TO BECOME?' (Luke 1:66)
5. **"HOW WILL THIS BE?"** Mary ponders God's touch upon her and her life as it will be radically changed, YET, she embraces her new reality – we'll consider: HOW MAY WE accept and embrace God's blessings in the midst of uncertainty & change – CONSEQUENCE & LIFE that our BEYOND OUR CONTROL? (Luke 1:34)
6. **"WHERE DO WE FIND HIM?"** The Magi, from the lands we know as IRAQ & IRAN, came looking for the baby Jesus – prophesied to be the King of Kings and Lord of lords. WHERE CAN WE FIND JESUS IN THE MIDST OF TODAY'S CRAZY WORLD? (Matthew 2:2)

## **I. HOW CAN I BE SURE? CAN I TRUST GOD?**

Zechariah – IS CHANGED from doubt to conviction

THE STORY & THE QUESTION: Luke 1:5-25

IS IT OK TO DOUBT GOD?

WHAT DO WE DO WHEN WE DOUBT GOD?

## **II. WHY ME?**

Elizabeth – Must deal with undeserved hardship & then blessing

THE STORY & THE QUESTION: Luke 1:39-45

WHAT DO WE DO? HOW DO WE RESPOND TO TIMES OF UNDERSERVED HARDSHIPS (OR BLESSINGS)?

## **III. ZECHARIAH'S PRAYER & PRAISE:**

THE STORY ---- Luke 1:57-65 – An Expression of CONVICTION!

### **PARTICULAR NOTE: Luke 1:76-80**

- You, my child, will be called prophet of the Most High!!!!
- You will 'prepare the way for him...'
- You will give people knowledge of salvation – what does it mean to be truly 'saved?'
- You will help to know & experience FORGIVENESS of sins
- You will help people to see that God will:
  - + SHINE upon the darkness
  - + LIFT people from the shadow of death,
  - + GUIDE them to the way of PEACE

### **SO WHAT?**

#### **1. What can we learn from Zechariah's story?**

Being "righteous & blameless" before God is VIP

Do we doubt God with cynicism or honest question?

(Zechariah – you ought to know better!)

God's orchestration of events overpowers our momentary slips & dips.

Our 'trust' is restored when we remember the past faithfulness of God.

### **Zechariah shows us that:**

- + TRUST IN GOD IS POSSIBLE
- + TRUST IN GOD IS PRECIOUS
- + TRUST IN GOD OPENS US TO GOD'S POTENTIAL
- + GOD'S TRUSTWORTHINESS & RELIABILITY ARE THE FOUNDATION of GOOD RELATIONSHIPS

#### **2. What can we learn from Elizabeth's story?**

Often life is filled with hardships (& blessings) that are not of our doing --- not even if we are "good people."

When we're in God's will, our bodies often recognize and even respond to the presence of the divine. Does yours?

We can CHOOSE how we respond to the 'good' and the 'bad.'

### **Elizabeth's story helps us to see that:**

- + Some hardships & blessings have a divine purpose
- + We (or those closest to us) are often being prepared to be a part of a bigger plan therefore, we must have the capacity to be selfless!!!
- + Blessings must not be squandered
  - a. RECOGNIZE God's hand
  - b. Be RESPONSIBLE in our care of blessings
  - c. Be prepared to RELEASE God's blessings
  - d. REMAIN righteous in heart & life

### **BOTTOM-LINE: BE OPEN TO THE SURPRISES OF GOD'S BLESSINGS**

#### **WE ALL HAVE A CHOICE & THE POWER TO MAKE IT!!!**

- + TRUST GOD in EVERY HARDSHIP & EVERY BLESSING
- + SEE BEYOND ONESELF ---
- + RECOGNIZE the POSSIBILITY OF GOD'S HAND AT WORK
- + ENJOY THE BLESSING
- + SHARE THE BLESSING