

Christmas Sign

Prayer

Over Exposure?

Many of us have heard many different Christmas Sermons. We have heard the Christmas story time and time again. We have sung every Christmas carol hundreds of times. So I was sitting there this week praying about what to preach on and how to present the most amazing story in a way, that due to the numerous times that people have heard about the great events at Christmas, that people didn't automatically start channel surfing in their heads.

Now I am not criticizing. I know that you all love the Lord or you wouldn't be here this morning. So as I was praying about this I asked: "God how do I re-ignite the fire in peoples hearts about when you came to earth incarnate in the body of a tiny baby."

I said: "Lord people have heard about the proclamation of the Angel Gabriel to Mary. They have heard about Harod and his insanity, they have been told about the Herodians. They have heard about the degree of Caesar. They have been told about he gifts, they have heard about the innkeeper and the lack of vacancy at the inn. And they have heard about the wise men from the east. What new revelation or aspect of your great arrival can I share to re-ignite the spirit of Christmas?"

You see from my perspective the Christmas story has been approached and preached many different ways. There is such a familiarity among Christians on this material, that in many cases, complacency has resulted over the tremendous events of that special eve.

Going Deeper

So I asked the Holy Spirit to reveal the Word to me and pressed into the Word of God once again. This is something I urge each of you to do as well.

How many of you have read Luke 2:11,12?

Let me read it here again... Cause there is something very interesting about this, because it doesn't ring quite right...

For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.

Now I asked myself: "What does "And this will be a sign to you:..." mean?"

It is heralding how we will recognize the almighty Son of God! The Messiah! The Promised one!

So... I kind of expect the next words to be something like: "The mountains will quake and all of the trees in the land will catch fire yet not be consumed and verily the stars in the heaven will realign and spell the name Emanuel" or something supernaturally awesome. So when we read "You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger" I asked myself: "how is that a sign from God?"

The Miracle

The sign was a miracle in that the Word was made flesh.

John 1:1

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

They were even told in the Word of God that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem and yet they still missed it...

Micah 5:2

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting."

The sign is missed

Did you notice that many of the Jews missed the sign?

So why would they miss the sign?

The Jews wanted liberation from the Romans. They wanted a warrior King. They were so wrapped up in their own conception of what the Messiah should be that they failed to see what he was.

Jesus the Son of God, coming in the flesh and as a baby was a miracle. The almighty God of the universe humbled himself to come as an infant. He experienced the human condition. He came as a sacrifice for you and for me and for all who would believe in him.

Perhaps the Jews wanted Jesus to come like the Greek myth of Zeus with a lightning bolt in his hand riding a fiery chariot...

You see like so many of us, they envisioned what they thought they needed. They put into their minds their own concept of what their savior would be like. They

tried to imprint the Messiah with their own plans, ambitions and desires. They wanted liberation from the Romans, but God wanted to restore their relationship with him. They wanted a conquering King, God wanted to redeem his people and save them from their sin.

God priorities are not always the same as ours

“Story of Matt’s healing...”

- God healed his heart
- God filled him with the Holy Spirit
- God did not heal the physical ailment (God had other priorities)

You see Jesus came as a human baby, born of Mary... He laid aside the glory of his deity and came in the most humble way possible. He was to be our example and our revelation and so he came as fully God, yet also fully man.

Consider the virgin birth... Mary would have been considered an unwed mother and would have been in disgrace, yet by a visitation and faith in God, Joseph stepped up to the plate. (Miracle...)

Next notice that even the men that Jesus chose as his apostles were, to say the least, not really the noted elite of society.

You see, Jesus came with a message and a mission. He came like us to show us the way. He did not do it the way the leaders of the day wanted or expected.

Jesus is not God?

Some have tried to deny Jesus being fully God and fully man. He had to come as a baby. If Jesus was not incarnate in the flesh, he could not have died for our sins.

Regarding those who have tried to deny his status, we read in 1 John 4:1-3:

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

Now, I stand for a persons right to believe what they believe, but one is not saved or Christian if they do not believe that Jesus was both fully God and fully man. For example the Hindus believe that Jesus might be one of many gods, the Muslims say he was a great prophet but deny his deity. Others say he was just a man. Regardless of the position on this we either believe in what the Word of God tells us or we don't.

So back to the reason for missing the sign...

What it comes down to here is our natural perspective...

We recognize what we want to recognize. The God of the universe created the mundane and the natural and yet we only seem to recognize his handiwork in the supernatural.

When God stops the sun from moving across the sky we are all impressed and say only God could do that, yet what about the fact that the sun exists and that the earth rotates and orbits the sun. Oh that's just nature... But it wouldn't even exist if not for God.

We write off miracles so often as coincidence. We ask God for something, he delivers and then we deny the source and rob ourselves of the celebration of what God has done.

Many missed the sign of Jesus because it was the birth of a human baby...

Our ways are not Gods ways. Our thoughts are not his thoughts

How about myth of the Greek goddess Athena who supposedly sprung fully formed from the head of Zeus? How does a baby wrapped in his father's burial cloths compete with that?

Our ways are not God's ways. We need to have faith in him and trust him. These myths reflect our desire to control and our perception of power. They reflect what we think God should be like not who he tells us he is.

How many Jews do you believe ever though that the messiah would come to victoriously die on a tree?

Jesus came into this world and appeared helpless. He was bound up his swaddling clothes and he left the world willingly bound up for each one of us. Then he returned and gave us liberty and freedom for all time.

We see a natural picture of helplessness, yet that infant would save all mankind and restore them into right relationship with God the Father. In mankind's limited view they wanted a savior that met their expectations that could build the faith of a few people at that time. God's scope was not the liberation of Israel from the Romans; his scope was to be the savior and the deliverer of all mankind for all time.

Okay so why was he born in a manger?

First off, loved all the Christmas pageants and plays wherein we see Jesus laying in a barn with hay everywhere and a feeding trough. The reality is that most mangers

were caves hollowed out of the side of a hill. Isn't it interesting that Jesus comes to us suffering the human condition is bound and then placed into a cave. I wonder is it a foreshadowing of his binding and being laid to rest in the cave that became his tomb?

Let me ask you this question...

A fully formed adult might have some difficulty accepting their condition but how would a baby react to the extreme poverty of the situation.

In the words of Francis of Assisi, "For our sakes he was born a stranger in an open stable; he lived without a place of His own wherein to lay his head, subsisting by the charity of good people; and he died naked on a cross in the close embrace of holy poverty."

We read in Philippians 2:8

But (he) made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

You see from my perspective, Jesus lying in that cave wrapped in his Father's death cloths as swaddling clothes and sleeping in a trough is truly the sign we should be recognizing... Jesus came humbly as a servant and being made in human likeness came to serve and to die to win the greatest victory of all. They could not understand Jesus coming in this fashion just like we so often fail to recognize God's influence on our lives. Romans 11:33 CEV says: "*Who can measure the wealth and wisdom and knowledge of God? Who can understand his decisions or explain what he does*"

The amazing miraculous sign was simply the birth of a baby boy. God humbled himself, made himself vulnerable, put himself into a lowly status at birth and came to die because he loves us.

The Lens of Faith

The world does not see the kingdom of God because they are only looking to the supernatural and miraculous. While God does occasionally do those things, we as people forget the miracle of life on this planet alone. The miracle of the universe. We think of God doing "magic", but forget that he created the natural laws that sustain our very existence.

From my natural point of view:

- Every time a baby is born, I see a Godly miracle. A life is created and born.

- Every time the sun comes up in the morning, I see a Godly miracle.
- Every breath I take is a miracle of the oceans and the trees creating oxygen and filtering the air.
- The fact that God loves me and came, died and rose again for me is a miracle.

The thing that is most significant about these supposedly natural signs we are given is: Only a person looking for them through a lens of faith can see them. God wants us to put on our spiritual lenses. He wants us to see him. The Jews missed out because their perspective blinded them.

The Kingdom in Parables

Matt 13:10,11

Jesus 'disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you use nothing but stories when you speak to the people?" Jesus answered: I have explained the secrets about the kingdom of heaven to you, but not to others

Mark 4:10-13

When Jesus was alone with the twelve apostles and some others, they asked him about these stories. He answered :I have explained the secret about God's kingdom to you, but for others I can use only stories. The reason is, "These people will look and look, but never see. They will listen and listen, but never understand. If they did, they would turn to God, and he would forgive them." (Matthew 13. 18- 23; Luke 4:34

John 10:6

Jesus told the people this story. But they did not understand what he was talking about

John 16:25

I have used examples to explain to you what I have been talking about. But the time will come when I will speak to you plainly about the Father and will no longer use examples like these

The Gift of Faith Reveals God

We are to seek the best gifts... If you want to put on the lenses of faith and see what God is doing... Ask the Holy Spirit for the gift of Faith

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but they all come from the same Spirit. There are different ways to serve the same Lord, and we can each do different things. Yet the same God works in all of us and helps us in everything we do. The Spirit has given each of us a special way of serving others. Some of us can speak with wisdom, while others can speak with knowledge, but these gifts come from the same Spirit. To others the Spirit has given great faith or the power to heal the sick or the power to work mighty miracles. Some of us are prophets, and some of us recognize when God's Spirit is present. Others can speak different kinds of languages, and still others can tell what these languages mean. But it is the Spirit who does all this and decides which gifts to give to each of us

Before I conclude today... let me ask a couple of questions

Can you look beyond just the supernatural to recognize God?

I am reminded of the Israelites in the desert... Yeah the Red Sea was parted and God was a cloud and a pillar of fire, but what about the clothes on their backs or their sandals that didn't wear out?

Of all the times you have read the story of Christ's birth have you ever stopped to ask your self why was a baby the sign? When you read the scriptures, which are the living Word of God, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal more to you. One thing I have learned in my studies is that there is always more being said than the surface narrative. Ask yourself why a scripture says what it does. Seek and ye shall find...

Jeremiah 29:13 says:

"...And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart."

Matthew 7:7,8

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened."

Christ's birth is a miracle! The fact that we are told the babe is a sign to us tells us more...

Look Deeper, look beyond the narrative, put on your spiritual lenses and exercise the gift of faith! Now reward yourself. Dig in and find all that God has for you!

Merry Christmas!

Prayer