

Christmas
Inconvenience or Invitation
Matthew 1:18-20

There was movie out a couple years ago entitled, Christmas with the Kranks. Tim Allen and Jamie Lee Curtis play a couple who have become empty nesters. Since their daughter is away for Christmas they decided to break with their family Christmas tradition. Instead of decorating their house like their neighbors all do and having their annual Christmas party, the husband plans for just the two of them to go on a Christmas cruise until they get a phone call. Take a look.

I love the final words out of Tim Allen's mouth, **“how does one call change so much.”** Mary and Joseph get that initial call from God that changed so much for them. But it wasn't one small task like the call from home that says, “hey on your way home would you mind stopping in the movie rental to pick up a movie” when all you want to do is come home and crash on the couch. This story is more intrusive than the neighbor who pops in just for a moment at the wrong time. The story about the birth of Jesus is big time major league call of inconvenience by your's truly, the creator of all the universe - God. For Mary and Joseph the inconvenience God threw at them would rewrite their life plans. We might miss an important truth of the Christmas story if we fail to consider how the invitation of God to Mary and Joseph first came along as something that totally interrupted their lives. We'll miss that truth if we want to quickly get to the scene of Jesus in the manger, the wise men bringing gifts, shepherds paying him honor because a band of angels tip them off about the birth of Jesus. But really Christmas is a story that begins with a call that changed everything a call of incredible inconveniences and interruptions.

Read Matthew 1:18-20

v.18 Mary is pregnant before she and Joseph have sexually consummated their marriage. Yes the Bible is claiming that before she had relations with any man, she conceived a baby- awkward.

v.20 Joseph must have been the type of guy that could roll with the punches life dished out because he decided to not make a big fuss about the pregnancy but divorce Mary quietly. However an angel appears to him in a dream and tells him he can't divorce Mary because the baby belongs to God.

What Mary and Joseph first faced as a monumental unfair inconvenience; he came a holy invitation from God to be a part of his plan to save the world.

Mary must have been thinking this is not how it was suppose to work. First comes love, then marriage and then Jesus in the baby carriage, but Lord what is going on?

Joseph must have been thinking how could she betray me. But I'll cut my losses and we'll go our separate ways and then a dream containing a call from God explained all of what was happening was God's plan.

It could do us all good on this first Sunday of the Advent Christmas season to consider this question. Because God worked through ordinary people, if they were fair game for God to do things like this aren't we?

We can mistake invitations from God as inconveniences.

Perhaps one truth to take from this story is that when God is moving in our lives what might really be an invitation to join up in what God is doing; we'll first mistake for inconvenience, a road block to our plans and happiness. The Bible is filled with stories of men and women who faced similar moments.

- Joseph from the Old Testament was a young man who dreamed of greatness. However his dream didn't include being sold into slavery by his brothers and doing time in prison for crimes he did not commit. But after all that he would later rise to prominence Egypt.
- Hannah was barren for years and prayed for a long time before she conceived her son who would be known as Samuel the great prophet.

The birth story of Jesus could be just what we need so we take a second look at what we thought was the last thing we needed in our life, because that last thing might be what God wants to use as an invitation to know him.

Application

What's been the big inconvenience in your life this week, month or year? You may still be seeing some circumstances as interruptions and road blocks when they may be an invitation from God. I not saying God ordered it or is the cause. Yes, it might be the Lord working in mysterious ways to get your attention or it may be God is willing to jump into that situation he didn't cause and help us if we'll let him.

In that movie clip the dad was devastated by the call, mom was elated. That scene is a great reminder that to start seeing God's invitations will require some choices of faith.

It is permissible to wrestle with the invitations that are inconvenient.

Perhaps a second truth from this portion of the Christmas story is that it is permissible to wrestle a bit with the inconveniences. Luke's version of the announcement to Mary has her asking the angel Gabriel, how it could be that a virgin was pregnant? Her tone is not just inquisitive it's a tone of being perplexed. It's a

tone of I need some answers Lord, because its not suppose to work this way. It's a tone that perhaps realizes the fallout on Mary and her family if she is found out to be pregnant before being fully married to Joseph. There nothing in that part of Mary's story that indicates the angel who gave the announcement discouraged Mary's questioning.

Joseph didn't sign on either in immediate agreement with God's plan. He didn't simply respond by saying, "thy will be done" when he learned Mary's pregnant. The scripture says, he had decided to divorce her. His attitude was the girl he had been engaged to had not been faithful to him. Joseph position was; "not in my house, this engagement is toast. You know Joseph wrestled with the situation; but the entire situation was of God's prompting.

Some questioning on the front end of whatever were facing can be helpful.

- Questioning helps to make sure the that whatever has to be really must be.
- Questioning demonstrates whether we trust God is big enough to handle our interruptions and major inconveniences.
- Questioning clarifies how God could use the inconvenience to his glory and our good.

If you're stuck with something that is your big call of bad timing that changes everything, maybe you're stuck because the only answers we're looking for is how can I get rid of the inconvenience. How can I get past the interruption and keep control of life the way it has been. Instead we need to ask what good can God bring out of the circumstance.

God uses our faithful obedience to reveal his presence and plans.

Perhaps a third truth is seen in how Mary and Joseph move from

seeing this as a major inconvenience and intrusion to an invitation to be a part of God's will. They move from being distraught, disappointment and questioning to listening to God's message for them. They first move forward because they trusted God. They believed they were being invited into something greater than themselves, greater than their expectations for their lives. Only time would tell if they were crazy or correct but they took a step of faith.

Faith is not knowing for sure; faith is trusting what is sure and that is God. They acted not knowing for sure how things would play out but the step of faith they took was trusting God's call.

Maybe on this first Sunday morning of the Christmas season there is a need for you to rethink some issue, relationship, situation and ask, could what you thought was a terribly inconvenient thing to happen be turned into an invitation from God? Or maybe there is a circumstance that certainly God did not conjure up, however, he is offering you through the inconvenience in your life an invitation to join him?

Some may resist hearing a message like this. Because so much in our culture encourages us to be in complete control of our lives. Have life on our terms. Seek convenience and comforts because we've earned it, don't let anything intrude. Some people and Christians included will really struggle and never see that moment of inconvenience as possibly God's invitation to something greater. I believe this because some Christians will easily decide to miss worship or a ministry function, but would never think about missing a ball game at school or their favorite television program because they refuse to be inconvenienced. People will justify not coming to worship because of things like company are visiting. Man that is great time to demonstrate your faith, let your life be a witness but the opportunity is missed. I don't know if we can hear this message at Christmas time because people will say I can't come to church after all Christmas is about family. No it's not it's

about Christ and his birth and what that still means to us today.

Please know I believe God understands people occasionally missing worship because sometimes work has to be done, special occasions come up and activities are there to enjoy. I don't have a problem with people sometimes just needing to be by themselves and get away from everyone. I just sometimes hear and see Christians who will be flexible about missing out on the things of God; but they are strict and rigid about their personal interest. It makes me worry that if a person has so little tolerance to make adjustments both ways, then when the invitations of God come they are going to see it only an interruption to avoid? Like this Wednesday a couple of us are going to Reelfoot Rural Ministry to work in their Christmas store. It's possible we might even take some youth. Mr. Jones at the Junior High has said kids can be excused for service opportunities like that. Maybe it would be a bit inconvenient for some of you but it might be an experience God will use to work on us a bit as well.

One of the disturbing truths of the Christmas story is our inconveniences are God's invitation to know his eternal power in the here and now. Pastor Michael Slaughter writes, **“It is very difficult to make changes in your life that honors God, but if you are willing to do all that you can, God will do all that you can't.”** (Christmas is Not Your Birthday, p.14) Sometimes the cold comforting truth is God doesn't care when we say this not the time or the place for me to have to go through _____? Because God is God. What he desires most is that our soul and character become more like him. He seeks those who will be more sold out to him more than any interest, hobby or passion so that in those life inconveniences, we will see him and he will reveal himself to us.

I wonder if some of our problem is we think God is not real or really involved otherwise these interruptions and inconveniences of life would never occur. But maybe the issue is were not real.

We're not being real and genuine when we say we would follow Jesus to the cross, because some Christians won't even follow Jesus to a church building or extra activities. How can they be real in their relationship with Christ. According to Bible books like ACTS 2, worshipping God with other Christians is part of our spiritual DNA, the blue print for being Christian.

At times we may doubt and wonder if God is real but maybe we're not being real because Jesus said the truth will set you free, and sometimes avoid truth telling because somehow it's inconvenient.

God is real and he is looking and inviting us into a real relationship with him not just one of comfort and convenience. God is real and he is looking for those who will really trust him. Mary asked the angel, "how can this be?" Her relationship to God was real enough to question and she accepted her role. Then she discovered how real God was when the baby came and wise men came and shepherds came.

God's invitations in the midst of interruptions and inconveniences still happen today.

Stories from klove.org

I read about a pastor who was sent phony money orders to pay for his church's food supplies for a community Thanksgiving Service. He learned they were counterfeit just days before the supplies needed to be picked up. He wondered what he was going to do but they prayed and the word got out and anonymous donations came in to cover the meal.

I read about a Mississippi church that in recent years was destroyed twice, once by fire and then by tornado. A little church of less than a 100 people. Many outside the church thought the church would fold. But as the pastor and leaders sent prayers up and their story went out, money came in from as far away as

Australia and a Jewish Children's school also sent financial donations. Members came back and the church is moving forward.

God's provision were revealed through those inconvenient trials.

There is a very popular phrase that is repeated through the Bible and especially the Old Testament, and the phrase is "consider your ways." In all different seasons of life God speaks to individuals, to groups of people and says consider your ways. And on this first Sunday of the Christmas season, consider how your current inconveniences could be turned into God's invitation. God can use the interruptions that change everything to change us and reveal Him.