

The Journey to Treasure at Christmas

Luke 2:1-5

December 18, 2011

We would like to begin this mornings message hearing about various aspects of Christmas through the understanding of children. Take a look.

Video - http://www.youtube.com/watch_popup?v=ki8EcnVbd-

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Hopefully as time goes along those kids will be nurtured in the scriptural account about the birth of Jesus. But you don't have to be a child to miss out on the deeper truths from the story of Jesus birth. And perhaps one part of the story of Jesus that goes under appreciated is the journey of Mary and Joseph and what that can mean to us.

Read Luke 2:1-5

One of the names for **Jesus is the name Immanuel** which means "God is with us." There are 52 Sundays in every year and I bet any preacher would tell you that many of those Sundays their sermons are going to need to emphasize in different ways the truth about how God is with us, how God lives up to his name - Immanuel.

One of the reasons God wants to assures us of his presence is because we all share something that Mary and Joseph experienced. The experience we share with them goes beyond having a baby, it is beyond starting out life in humble ways or any other similarity we might be able to make with them. The one similarity we have with the earthly parents of Jesus Christ is that life has it shares of journeys we will take that are not of our choosing. And it is especially when life takes us down the unexpected path we didn't choose that God wants us to know he goes with us. We look for God to be near like a young child sent to their room at bedtime

trusting that mom and dad are right down the hallway watching over them.

The scripture we heard from Luke reminds us that God watches over us as our heavenly Father. Luke chapter two verses one through five describe how the Roman Emperor Augustus ordered a census of the people for the sake of collecting taxes. And everyone at least in the land of Israel which was under the control of Rome was ordered to go to their home town to be counted. Mary and Joseph were in Nazareth, but Joseph's hometown was Bethlehem a ten day journey by foot. Joseph and Mary were required to go to Bethlehem for the census. It was not a trip Mary and Joseph wanted or chose, especially since she was so far along in her pregnancy. But what the Roman government ordered must be obeyed.

So when we have those times in life that force us to not just take a physical trip; but force us to move in our understandings and adjust to our circumstances then were in good company with Mary and Joseph.

There is speculation about the route that Mary and Joseph took to get from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Some biblical scholars think they would have taken a route that would have caused them to go around the area of Samaria. Yet other scholars disagree because to go around the region of Samaria would have added two extra days to their journey. When your nine months pregnant riding a donkey you're probably not looking to add two hours to the ride let alone two days. Therefore other scholars believe that because of Mary's advance stage of pregnancy, Joseph would have taken the quickest route to Bethlehem and that would mean going through Samaria.

If Mary and Joseph would have taken the route that went through Samaria the interesting thing is they would pass through a geographical museum of history about how God had work through

the life of their ancestors. Luke chapter 2 doesn't tell us that. Unless you really know biblical history and geography were not going to pick up on the significance of their journey. We just read Mary and Joseph traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem and think no big deal. We think of it casually like telling someone we plan to drive x amount of miles from Newbern to Jackson. But Nazareth to Bethlehem was a journey through some incredible memories of how God had been with his people - Immanuel in the life of Mary and Joseph's ancestors. As they walked they passed by reminders that God has always been watching over his children. God has always been involved.

The route I believe Mary and Joseph traveled was known as the Way of the Patriarchs. According to Pastor Adam Hamilton The Way of the Patriarchs would have Mary and Joseph retracing 1600 years of religious history.

- It was in this area they would have moved through the land where God first appeared to Abraham in places like Shechem and Bethel and made the promise to give Abraham special land. Maybe your here today and you have experienced God keeping his promise to you in some way or maybe you think God has let you down?
- They would have moved through the land where Genesis tells us about how Jacob near the Jabbok River wrestled with God and when it was all over, Jacob was a changed man. Maybe you could describe wrestling with God in your own unique way and how that has changed you for the better.
- Mary and Joseph would have camped nears springs and wells used by their forefather and mothers over the last 1600 years including the well Jacob dug near Shechem.
- They would have passed by the place where the Joseph the great hero of the Old Testament was buried after his descendents were freed from Egypt.
- They would have passed near the land where great prophets like Elijah and Elisha preached and did great miracles.

- They would have traveled the path that the Assyrian Army used to come and defeat the northern kingdom of Israel and that same route was used by the Babylonian Army to defeat the 2 remaining tribes that made of the southern kingdom of Israel known as Judah.
- But the route they took was also where later on men like Nehemiah came back to rebuild Jerusalem after it's defeat.
- It would also be significant that Mary and Joseph traveled this route because they would have gone through the region known as Samaria. Samaria was a big deal because in Samaria lived Jews who intermarried with non-Jews and there was bitter hostility between Jews and Samaritans. Most Jews thought it was impure to have any dealings with Samaritans.
- But remember in the gospel of John it was Jesus who stopped at Jacob's well and was willing to talk and even receive water from a Samaritan woman who had been divorced many times. It was in Luke's gospel where Jesus said a good Samaritan demonstrated what loving your neighbor looks like more than the religious Jews who knew God's commandments.

So when Mary and Joseph take this trip that was not of their choosing, the journey took them through all these places where they have reminders how God has always been with his people. They have these reminders of God being there when his people were victorious. But this isn't no Disney story, they have reminders of God being there when God's people were defeated and some of that defeat they brought upon themselves just as we sometimes do. They journeyed through a land filled with people being prejudice against each other but Jesus would love them all.

Application

Perhaps in this season of celebration of Christ birth our challenge is to know the particular gift God wants to give us and get to us for

whatever journey we are facing and going to be encountering.

Maybe it is a gift of strength for us is to know whatever lies ahead **God will get us through** so we can bear the burden and neither give up or give in. Someone sent me a quote recently that read **“When God solves your problems, you have faith in His abilities; when God doesn’t solve your problem He has faith in your abilities.”** Either way strength comes when we trust and experience his presence.

Maybe the gift is to **gain a sense of peace** because we come to accept that what God wants most is that our character becomes more like Jesus Christ. Our character in Christ grows as we trust no earthly circumstance can separate us from God’s love. Prayer won’t always change our circumstances but God can change us to cope with our situations and that can give us peace of mind and heart.

God gives us the gift to look forward and let go of the things of the past that have been holding us down or holding us back.

But the one thing God wants most is for us to know where ever our journeys take us and however pleasant or unpleasant it might be he is Immanuel - God with us.

Remember seeing this picture used in worship a few months back? The young lady’s name is Brittany Bevin. She died four weeks shy of her 18th birthday on September 22, 2003. I mentioned in my sermon how she had completed mission work in places like India and had a passion for kids. The night before her death she had written in her prayer journal a prayer she entitled, My Dangerous Prayer. She wrote a prayer that described her desire to live for Christ. Before the age of 18 she had lived more for Jesus than we might accomplish in a lifetime.

But six years after her death this is what her father wrote.

“Six years ago tonight we all sat down to dinner and enjoyed good conversation, laughter and a good meal.

Six years ago tonight, you and I did the dishes - I washed you dried.

Six years ago tonight you told me you couldn't wait until your 18th birthday - just 4 weeks away. I teased you about how anticlimactic that day would actually be, but you didn't believe me.

Six years ago tonight I remember wondering how you had grown up so fast.

Six years ago tonight I almost gave you your birthday present early, the one I had been hiding for weeks... the bronze statue of the Prodigal Son's father that symbolized my love for you.. I wish I had given you that gift.

Six years ago tonight we were just an American family spending a Sunday evening together at home.

Six years ago tonight, I sat in bed with your mom and we marveled out loud at how blessed we were to have 5 healthy beautiful daughters, a great church, a comfortable home in a wonderful neighborhood, the hope of a bright future ahead for us.

Six years ago tonight after we kissed you good night you sat in your room and wrote a dangerous prayer to God (to use your life.)

Six years ago tonight I went to bed feeling like the luckiest man alive...

Like Joseph and Mary that father was forced down a path he certainly did not choose.

Would anybody accuse that father of not loving his daughter?

Would anyone suspect him of not doing enough to somehow shield her from danger and harm?

Since she tragically died in a auto accident would any one doubt her father exist?

He was a faithful loving father for as long as he had his daughter.

Conclusion

But God is our faithful eternal father. He wants to assure us that when life takes us down paths we didn't choose, paths we dread and fear he goes with us. The baby in Mary's womb was God in the flesh going along on the unwanted journey with Mary and Joseph. Mary and Joseph knew some things, but little did they know the baby she would bare would change the world. They couldn't see all that Jesus would be and accomplish; but they trusted God as they made the unwanted journey. God is eternal and his love and gifts of help and guidance are reachable through faith in Him as we take our journeys in life.