



ADVENT

DEVOTIONS

NOVEMBER 25-DECEMBER 23

2018

ROGERSVILLE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

MONDAY November 26, 2018:

Joseph

Matthew 1:1 This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham: 2 Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,

I dare say most people do not enjoy reading all the verses that say who begot who and goes on for multiple verses in the Bible. Matthew is one such book. It opens with the genealogy of Jesus through the lineage of Joseph. *“Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.”*

So why give us the lineage of Jesus through Joseph, if Joseph was not really His father? Well look at some of the names in this lineage. Tamar tricked her father-in-law Judah into getting her pregnant to fulfill the promise Judah made to her to give her to his son Shelah, so she could stay in the family. Not exactly a righteousness move. Then there is Rahab, the harlot, who hid the spies in Jerusalem; and of course Ruth, who through some trickery ended up married to Boaz. Not the lineage you would expect for the Son of God. But it does make something very clear to us. God can use the mess we often make out of our lives to accomplish His good. The one thing all these people had in common, they believed in God. They may not have always acted like it, but they did. God had a plan to accomplish the redemption of humanity and even when humanity, here both men and women, messed it up God still used their actions for good. Your life may be messed up in some places, it may be less than righteous in some areas, but when you hand all your life over to God, He will make something wonderful out of it.

TUESDAY NOVEMBER 27, 2018:

Joseph

Matthew 1:18 This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.

It is not uncommon to hear of someone breaking off an engagement. If the, soon to be, bride or groom decide they do not want to get married they call off the engagement. Feelings are hurt and there is usually anger over this, but seldom does it end up in court.

However, in the days of Jesus engagements were different. They were legally binding. Most marriages were prearranged so the engagement was just the fulfillment of a contract that may have been made as soon as the child was born. In verse 19, Matthew calls Joseph the husband of Mary. So once an engagement was announced it was legally binding and breaking it was a legal matter. However, Mary being pregnant before marriage was an unthinkable sin. It was a legal reason to break the engagement, and that is just what Joseph planned to do. But notice he was going to do it quietly and not make a public spectacle of Mary. This tells us Joseph was a good man from the very beginning.

When someone does you wrong, how do you handle it? Do you make it public and try to insult and injure them? Do you go out of your way to make them pay for what they have done wrong? Do you follow the example of Joseph? Do you handle it between you and that person and try to work it out? Do you seek God's council in making the decision?

It could not have been easy for Joseph. I suspect it was the hardest decision in his life. But because he was a good man, he heard the voice of the Angel and God gave Joseph what He wanted Joseph to do. God will do the same for you. If you live long enough someone will do you wrong. If you listen to God close enough, He will give you the answer and heal the wrong.

WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 28, 2018

Joseph

Matthew 1:21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

Both Mary and Joseph were told to name the baby Jesus. So why does Matthew 1:23 say that Jesus fulfilled the words of the prophet “*and they will call him Immanuel*”

Mary and Joseph were told that they would name Him Jesus. Which I will address again in the Mary devotions of how odd it was for a man who was named Joseph to name his child a different name. But notice it says the people would call Him Immanuel. For years I wondered how Isaiah’s prophecy was fulfilled if He was named Jesus and, it seemed to me, that was the name used the majority of times in the New Testament. But there are times when a person’s name is something different than what he/she is called. The Pope’s real name is Jorge Mario Bergoglio. But the people call him “the Pope”. Do you recognize the name Marion Robert Morrison? Maybe you know him better as “The Duke” or John Wayne. Sometimes what people are called or how they are known is not actually their name. In this case, His name was Jesus but the people called Him Immanuel, which means: God with us. They called Him Immanuel because they realized that He, Jesus, was the incarnation of God among the people. They knew by His grace, love and care that He was not just Jesus, deliverer, rescuer, but He was the very essence of God dwelling among the His people.

If you were to be given a name that reflects how others see you or what they see in you: What would your name be?

THURSDAY NOVEMBER 29, 2018

Joseph

Embarrassed to death.

Matthew 1:24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the Angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.

I can't image what Joseph was feeling when he woke up and decided to do what the Angel and God had told him. Follow the logic here for just a minute. *Matthew 1:18* His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. This means when the Angel came to Joseph, he and Mary were not married, they were engaged. They were still in the year of engagement that was common during the days of Jesus. Therefore, Joseph took Mary home to be his bride before the end of the year's engagement. That would have been the first scandal. Next, anyone doing the math would have suspected Joseph could not be the father just based on how long Mary had been pregnant. Even if they were married very close to when Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit, everyone would have known she became pregnant before the engagement was up. So, she, and her son, would not have had the best of reputations.

Joseph knew when he took her home that he was also giving up on how he had planned his life and his family. He would have known that by taking her as his wife, her shame was his shame. Yet, he still believed, and he still married Mary. I wonder when he closed his eyes and thought of a son what came to mind. I am sure he never dreamed he would have married a scandalous woman. I'm sure his dream for his family always included the children being his children. Yet all of that was gone now. His family would never be what he had envisioned. While I don't know what his vision was for his family, I am sure it was different than God's vision for his family.

We never know what God may have in store for us. We have no way of knowing if our vision is God's vision for our lives. All we can do is pray for wisdom and strength and be willing to follow wherever that vision may lead. Even if that vision means the destruction of all our dreams. If we are fulfilling God's plan and God's vision for our lives, then God will provide for all of our needs just as He provided for Joseph and his young family.

FRIDAY NOVEMBER 30, 2018

Joseph

Luke 2:48 When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." 49 "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" 50 But they did not understand what he was saying to them. 51 Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart.

"Don't you know I had to be in My Father's house?" We don't know much about the relationship between Joseph and Jesus. Matthew 2 tells us that they lived in Egypt for a couple of years while waiting for Herod to die, but other than that all we know is that they lived in Nazareth. I wonder how often Joseph thought about the fact that the child he was raising was not his own. I wonder if he still believed the Angel came to visit him or maybe it was "an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of underdone potato." {Charles Dickens, A Christmas Carol} No matter what Joseph believed, he had raised Jesus as his own and was faithful to His education. How do we know that? Because Jesus is 12 and here He is at Jerusalem for his 12th birthday for his bar mitzvah. The trip was an expensive trip, and Joseph was not a rich man, but he made sure Jesus was at the temple for His birthday. It was bad enough Jesus was lost for 4 days, but when they find Him, Jesus reminds Joseph that he is not His father. Joseph's "house" was a workshop in Nazareth, not the Temple. So when Jesus said He had to be in His Father's house, it must have cut Joseph to the bone. Even if Joseph remembered for these 12 years that Jesus belonged to God, do you really think he enjoyed being reminded that he was not the father of Jesus? I am also sure Jesus did not try to hurt Joseph intentionally. It was simply Jesus telling the truth. But none the less I suspect it hurt Joseph. If we live long enough someone will hurt us. Accidentally, or intentionally, someone will injure us, hurt our feelings, make us angry and even embarrass us. Someone will say something that cuts us to the core. The question is not "will it happen", but what will you do when someone hurts you?

SATURDAY November 31, 2018

Joseph

Luke 2:48 When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." 49 "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" 50 But they did not understand what he was saying to them. 51 Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart.

This is the last time Joseph is mentioned in the Bible. We are never told what happened to him. It is presumed that Joseph must have died before Jesus began His ministry. In a society where family was so important it would be odd that we did not know what happened to Joseph.

Through the biblical genealogies we know just about everyone's dad and child, where they died and how old they were, except for Joseph.

The simple fact is that Joseph was not the father of Jesus and therefore there is not a lot said about him or his history. God was His Father and that is who they focus on for the rest of His story. Mary continues to be an active part of His ministry because she is His mother. She will always have a place in the story and the history of the church.

People come and go in our lives. Some are important for only a season while others are important our entire life. Some add to our lives, some take away. Some enhance our lives while others bring trial and tribulation.

However, Christ is forever. John 1:1 tells us Jesus was there in the beginning and Revelation tells us He will be there at the end. Life is a gift from God, salvation and eternal life is a gift from Jesus. In-between life and death, the only thing that is always consistent is the grace and love of Jesus.

MONDAY December 3, 2018

The Shepherd

Luke 2:8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An Angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

There were three people, in the days of Jesus who were usually shepherds. Some shepherds were children who were younger than the age of 15ish. Both young boys and girls were shepherds or shepherdess, before they reached the age of “adulthood”. Boys at the age of 12 went to the temple to be dedicated to God. Once they did this, they went home and began studying with their father to follow his steps in whatever skill or job he did to make a living. Few boys over the age of 12 would have been in the field watching sheep, unless that was how the family made a living and, even then, there were usually others to watch the sheep in the field. Shepherdess were usually engaged by the age of 12-14 and married by 15. Once they became engaged, they left the field to prepare to be married. The third group would be those who were very poor, owned no land, crops or herds of their own; and made a living by caring for the herds of others. These were usually poor people who were some of the lowest in the social class and, most often, ignored by others and even the Temple. So for an Angel to come to them would have been unexpected. I dare say this is one of the few times in their lives that such great attention had been paid to them by anyone, much less an Angel. This was the first sign that, with the birth of this new king, things were about to change and those who in the past were ignored were about to find; they had a place in this kingdom.

The same is true for us today. The church should be that place where everyone has a place, everyone is loved and cared for, and everyone is equal. I know that is not the way most churches function; but imagine the difference we could make in the world if, in the church, EVERYONE was treated equal, and the love of God was freely given to everyone.

Robert

TUESDAY December 4, 2018

The Shepherd

Luke 2: 10 But the Angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

When you hear the word Prophet, what do you think of? For many of us names such as Daniel, Elijah, Isaiah and Moses come to mind. The word prophet is most often used to refer to the great and well-known prophets in the Bible. However, a prophet is anyone who speaks the word of God. Now imagine you are some poor shepherds in the field and suddenly an Angel appears to you and tells you they have great news for you to share with the people. In other words: You, shepherds, are going to be God's prophets. Remember yesterday I said that only the very young and very poor were normally shepherds. In other words, this is not people you would expect for God to call. Yet, here God is calling them.

God is always doing amazing and controversial things. God has a way of always going against what the world believes and showing us the path of true love. God sees people for who they are and not the way the world sees them. Since we are talking about them 2000 years later, God chose the right shepherds that evening. The Angels appeared to the right shepherds. Yet they were frightened, as any of us would have been had we seen all of this in the sky. But God chose the shepherds who would listen, follow and share the "great joy for all the people".

God has a calling for you as well. You are the right person for His calling. He knows you are the right person. Sometimes you just to have faith and follow God's call, always trusting He called the right person for this time and in this place.

WEDNESDAY December 5, 2018

The Shepherds

Luke 2:13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the Angel, praising God and saying, 14 “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

The Shepherds had seen the Angel appear and deliver God’s prophetic message, they had witnessed an entire host of Angels appearing and speaking to them. I don’t know how many is in a host or if they were more Angels. Revelation 4 says the heavenly host is made up of Angels but *also the seven spirits of God, the 24 elders and the 4 beasts that have eyes all around.*

Revelation 4: The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. 8Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings.

Maybe the shepherds were so afraid because, not so much the the message, but who brought the message to them.

Who is fitting and deserving to be used by God to deliver His message? Well, if the message can be sent to people who the world would not consider worthy to be prophets; then God can use whomever or whatever He chooses to deliver His message. I have discovered in my life that God has used a lot of different people and things to deliver His message. I hope and pray God has used some of my sermons to deliver a prophetic message to people who needed to hear His word.

What is important is look beyond who or what is delivering the message, so you can receive the prophecy God is sending to you. Look around in nature, in the song of a bird, in the quiet of the morning, in the beauty of the sky to see how God is reaching out to you. Look in the eyes of a child, the poor, the homeless, the person the world wants to forget. Look in places you may have never looked before. You may find God is using these places and people to send you a word of comfort and prophecy that He knows you need to hear.

THURSDAY December 6, 2018

The Shepherds

Luke 2:16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child,

Let me ask you an interesting question? Where would you go to see the new born King/Savior?

In a Palace? The Angel gave them very little information. *Luke 2:11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.*” Everyone knew the town of David was Bethlehem. This is where David was born, it is where Samuel found him. But there were no royal homes in Bethlehem. All of them were in Judah, Jerusalem or Caesarea Philippi.

Since it is the Savior and Messiah then, it makes sense, He would be born in the House of God, the Temple. But that is in Jerusalem and the Angel said go to Bethlehem. That makes no sense. While it was the hometown of the greatest King of Israel, it was not a royal or religious place. It is just a small town on the outskirts of the Holy City. Maybe the Angels got it wrong, maybe they meant Jerusalem. That would make more sense than Bethlehem.

How many of us would have substituted our knowledge, intuition, in place of the prophecy given by the Angels. How many would have thought the Angels must have gotten it wrong and went to Jerusalem instead. We know another group of men who did this.

Faith is about having hope in the things unseen. Sometimes we must suspend what we think we know, what we believe to be true, to allow God to speak to us in new places, in new ways and through new avenues. Faith is about trusting the knowledge and love of God more than ourselves. It made no sense to go to Bethlehem, but that is what the Angel said. God sent the Angel, the Angel said Bethlehem, so they obeyed and went to Bethlehem. There they found the child, not in a Palace or the Temple, not even in a synagogue, but in a manger. Sometimes having faith means putting aside what we believe, what we think we know, so God can reveal new and amazing things to us.

FRIDAY December 7, 2018

The Shepherds

Luke 2:17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child,

As a pastor, I often refer to the great commission: *Matthew 28: 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*” Jesus instructs His disciples then, as well as His disciples today, that we are tasked with going into all of the world and making new disciples for Jesus Christ. However, we were not the first to be given this commandment. One could make the case that the Shepherds were the first to be given this great commission. The Angel instructed them to go and spread the word concerning what they had seen. Jewish people in those days would have recalled the prophecy of Micah 5:2 when the Shepherds told them the Messiah had been born in Bethlehem. They would have remembered Isaiah prophesy that the Messiah would be born of a virgin. These things, together with the Angels coming to the Shepherds, should have been enough to convince anyone that Jesus was the real Messiah. However, as we know, they were not convinced. Most Jewish people never accepted Jesus as the one true Messiah.

People have not changed in 2000 years. There are some people who are just going to refuse to listen to glory sightings and stories of miracles. There are some people who, no matter what you do, simply will not believe. But that does not give us permission or the right to give up on them. If they refuse to accept the Word, then pray for them. If they do not even want to discuss Jesus, then pray for God to soften their hearts. If they will not come to church or attend a small group, then ask God to show them the way. Don't give up, don't quit inviting; you never know when God will use something you say or one of your invitations to soften their hearts and move them to visit with you in church. The only way the word of God fails is if His children fail to spread His word.

SATURDAY December 8, 2018

The Shepherds

Luke 2:20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

We don't know what happened to the Shepherds. We are just told they returned glorying and praising God. It is the same way with the woman caught in adultery in John 8:1 and with the blind man who was healed in Luke 17:14. The woman was told and go sin no more while the man was told to go and show the priest. We are not told what happened to either. Did they do what Jesus said? Did they live good lives as believers? I think the gospel writers never tell us the answer to these questions because we are the answer. Each of us must answer for ourselves what we do after Jesus has forgiven us of our sins and told us to "go and sin no more". We become the living ending to these stories.

Do we go forward sharing all the things we have seen and been told? Do we go forward and sin no more? Do we testify to the healings and blessings in our lives? These are questions that we must each answer for ourselves. Christ watches each day to see what ending we put on the story of our lives.

MONDAY December 10, 2018

The Magi

Matthew 2: 1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem 2 and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

When a child is born, life must change. Parents, grandparents and others who have ever helped care for a baby know that your schedule is dictated by the baby's schedule. All of a sudden this small baby has turned all of life upside down. But it is a change that effects only a few people, the birth of the child doesn't change the entire universe. However, the birth of Jesus changed the stars, even the solar system. I wonder how many people were observant enough that evening to realize there was a new star in the sky. If they noticed this new star, did they know what it meant?

The fact that these men realized the star was new, and knew what it meant, tells us they must have studied the sky and stars often. So, the appearance of a new star would have been a major find for them. They knew it had to mean something great had happened and they wanted to be part of it.

We have a major advantage over them. We have the Scriptures, we know something great happened, and is happening every day. Christ is always with us. He is always doing great things. His love, His mercy, never leaves us. We just have to be observant enough to see Him around us. He comes to us in the love of family. He comes in the laughter of a child, the joy of something working out the way we had planned, family time together, in prayer and in reading His word. Jesus is all around us. When we take the time to slow down and be observant, we will see His hand, His glory, His love, in our lives and in the world around us.

TUESDAY December 11, 2018

The Magi

Matthew 2: 1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem 2 and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

Educated men, such as these Magi, did not travel alone. They would have traveled with servants, guards, cooks, and other members of their court. They had to make all the preparations for the trip. They had to pack all the clothing, food, and other supplies. As you will see in a later devotion this was about a 2-year trip. Think of all the things you would have to pack for a 2-year trip and the cost of traveling for 2 years. That does not even cover the cost of the gifts they were taking to the Child.

There are the first people, outside of His immediate family, that paid such a great cost to meet Him. However, they would not be the last. *Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. (Matthew 24:16)* All of us have our own crosses to bear. The problem becomes when we want others to bear our cross instead of helping someone else bear their cross. When we are too busy to volunteer for mission and ministry in the church or in the community, we hope someone else will bear that cross for us. When we fail to support the church or ministries of the church with our tithes and talents, we are counting on others to bear that cross for us. Even worse is when we don't even care if someone else bears the cross that allows the church to be in mission and ministry. The only way the great commission is accomplished is if we are willing to bear the cross of Jesus and support, be involved in, and even lead mission and ministry for Jesus.

If you are reading this, then there is a pretty good chance you have already discovered Jesus and make Him part of your soul. You have made your trip, you have found Christ. But the only way others will make the journey and find Christ, is if we are willing to bear the cost, physical, spiritual and monetary, to help them discover the King, who is Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

WEDNESDAY December 12, 2018

The Magi

Matthew 2:3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

There is no way the Magi could have known the heavy price that was going to be paid for a simple mistake. Would Herod have known a king was born had the Magi not made the mistake of going to the palace instead of going straight to Mary's house? But I really don't blame the Magi for going there. If someone had told you a king had been born; where would you go?

The mistake, however, was not the issue here. The issue here is the reaction of Herod.

Once he hears a king has been born, he is scared to death that he will be overthrown and killed or replaced on the throne. He was so worried about his position that he never thought about anyone or anything else. He planned from the very beginning to kill this child and anyone else he had to kill just to keep his place and position. What a sad commentary on his lack of morality and ethics. He will end up ordering the death of every child age 2 and under, just to protect what he wants and his position.

Think about this for a moment. Can you imagine being a mom who just had their child killed because a man is worried about himself or his position? Can you imagine someone being so self-centered that the life and death of others mean nothing to them, just as long as they get what they want. Can you imagine what it would be like if you had never heard the gospel because someone didn't want to have to change, be uncomfortable, or go new places. Can you imagine if your soul were at risk because someone thought less of you because of color, race, or your social status?

I can't imagine the death of so many small children because of one man being so self-centered. I also shutter at the loss of so many lives and souls when the modern church fails to accomplish the great commission.

As you prepare for Advent, what are some ways you can help accomplish the great commission and help others find Jesus so their souls might be saved?

THURSDAY December 13, 2018

The Magi

Matthew 2:9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.

Now that the star, the first ever GPS, was back, and they were paying attention to it again, they realized they were in the wrong place. This had been a very long journey. They saw His star come up when Jesus was born. Herod orders all children, 2 and younger, to be killed, according to when the Magi told him the star appeared. In other words, they have been in the process of trying to find Jesus for 2 years. We don't know if they left the first night they saw the star, but no matter when they left, they had been looking for Jesus for a long time. They were faithful to the search. Even when they arrived at the wrong place, instead of giving up, they continued to travel until they found the young King.

John Wesley taught that there are three expressions of grace. {Bear with me I promise this and the Magi tie together.} There is Prevenient grace, Jesus knows and loves you before you know Him.

There is Justifying grace, this is the first grace that you become aware of. This is when you realize Jesus is real and He died for you to reconcile you to God. Much as the Magi became aware of Jesus with the appearance of the star, so we become aware of Jesus and begin to follow Him.

Then there is Sanctifying grace. This is the long trip, for us a life time. This is the daily search to draw closer to Jesus. This is the daily prayer, Bible reading, and service to God so that we will someday meet the King, Jesus Christ, the Lover of our souls. Sometimes we make a wrong turn. Sometimes we spend time in the wrong place. Sometimes we go places where we should not be. Sometimes we put others at risk because of our mistakes.

But Christ is waiting for us at the end of our long journey. He gives us the strength to continue the journey when we are weak. He gives us mentors, friends, pastors, and family to show us the way to where He lives. Most of all, He is waiting to welcome us home.

FRIDAY December 14, 2018

The Magi

Matthew 2:11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.:

Most nativity scenes show the Magi standing with the Shepherds. They arrived a year or so later. However, that is a minor point. What matters is that both Shepherds and Magi bowed down and worshipped Jesus. You could not find a group of two people more different than Shepherds and Magi. Shepherds were uneducated, poor, the bottom of the social ladder in the days of Jesus. Magi were educated, rich, the cream of the crop, the top of the social ladder. The only time these people met was on the road and by accident. I can promise you Magi went out of their way to avoid a Shepherd. They did not even worship together. Since they were poor, Shepherds were often on the outside in the court of the Gentiles. IF they were allowed in, they were standing in the entrance and around the wall so as not to get too close or offend the nostrils of people like the Magi. The worship of God was very segregated and, at times, pretentious in the Temple. Yet here, at the side of this Child, there was no rich, no poor, no pretention, no prejudice. There was just worship of the Christ child. Here, in the worship of the Child, we see what His ministry will be like when He is older. Everyone will come, and everyone will be welcomed. He will touch the sick, listen to the blind, eat with sinners, condemn the Temple, feed the hungry and heal any who seek Him out in faith.

In the story of the birth and worship of Jesus, we see the great commission being fulfilled. People from all nations coming to worship Him. In the story of Shepherds and Magi worshipping the same Child and both being welcome into where he was living, as baby and youth, we see that everyone is welcome in His house.

In the presence of the both Shepherds and the Magi worshipping His birth we are assured that who we were, who we are, where we have been, or where we are at is not important to Him. To Jesus all that matters is that all come to worship Him.

SATURDAY December 15, 2018

The Magi

Matthew 2:12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Herod gave them a royal order to return to him and tell him where to find the Christ child. It does not matter if he was normally their king. They were in his land and you do what the king of the land says to do or you go to prison or you die.

So who should they be faithful to? If they go back to Herod, he is going to kill the Child. If they go back home another way, and they get caught, they could die. What to do, which way to go?

Throughout the birth of Christ we have seen people put in situations where they had to follow God or follow humanity. In every case, following humanity was going to be the easiest of the two ways. But in every case, following humanity meant going against the word and plan of God. As I said in the December 11th devotion, taking up your cross and following Jesus is not an easy thing to do. The world would have us leave the cross on the ground and follow others. The world offers the easy way, the fun way, the way of complete freedom and freewill to satisfy yourself and no one else. But that is not the way of Christ. The way of Christ is the way of the cross.

John 15:13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command. 15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends,

MONDAY December 17, 2018

Mary

Luke 1:30 But the Angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God.

Most theologians agree that Mary was somewhere between the ages of 12-15 when the Angel came to her and told her she was going to have a child. I can not image being so young and being told such amazing and confusing news. First: Mary had not known a man, so how could she be pregnant. Second, in those days, being pregnant and not married was almost certain a death sentence for the woman. Here, a very young Mary, is told that she is highly favored by God, and yet the very thing that shows her favor with God put her out of favor with everyone else in her world.

In the history of the church, those who sought to be faithful to God often found themselves at odds with the world and often with the church as well. Martin Luther and John Wesley were both excommunicated from the church because they dared to question the practices of the church that were at odds with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. William Tyndale was killed for believing people should have the word of God in their own language and publishing the Bible in English. There are times when, to be right with God, we will be at odds with the world and even with the church. As believers we are called to be faithful to God and Christ above all others. We are called to be faithful to the Gospel and the teaching of Jesus Christ. Often the world would have us believe what we are doing is wrong, will call us religious nuts, homophobes, racist and even bigots. But in those times, we must be true to Christ and His word rather than the world.

TUESDAY December 18, 2018

Mary

Luke 1: 28 The Angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." 29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

Why did this greeting trouble Mary so much? Why did she wonder what "kind of greeting this might be?" The clue might come from the Hebrew meaning of the words: "Dr. Campbell renders μ : Blessed art thou among women — That is, according to the Hebrew idiom, thou art the happiest of all the women that ever lived." What would you think if an Angel came to you and said you were the happiest of all people? Since it is an Angel telling you this; then wouldn't you assume it was true?

We don't know much about Mary's life before the Angel came to her. So, we don't know just how happy she was or how good or hard her life may have been. There are many legends and gleanings, Jewish traditions, about the family of Mary and her background. But the Biblical writers did not tell us anything about her. Why? For them the most important thing about the life of Mary began when the Angel came and spoke to her. It does not matter who her family was, where she was from, were they rich, poor, uneducated, or faithful? All that mattered was that Mary was faithful and was willing to follow the Lord, even if it endangered her own life.

God can and does use ordinary people. Jesus called 12 ordinary men, their only distinction, they were willing to follow wherever Jesus led them. Where you come from, who your parents are, your economic status, level of education, or your past is not important to God. The only thing that is important: Will you follow Jesus wherever He leads you?

WEDNESDAY December 19, 2018

Mary

22 When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”), 24 and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons.

Flash forward for a moment to the arrival of the Magi. Imagine those gifts being opened in front of Mary. I suspect she had never seen so much money or such valuable gifts in her young life. Just imagine the gift she and Joseph would have given at the Temple if the Magi had arrived on the night of His birth rather than a couple of years later. If they had these gifts when Jesus was 8 days old they would have given a larger offering to God than two turtle doves, a poor mans offering, for the birth of Jesus. But what better gift to give the Temple, in the name of Jesus, than two turtle doves. Like the widow’s mite, the turtle doves were not given out of Joseph’s abundance but rather they were a real sacrifice for him to buy and then offer to God.

As you have seen in many of the devotions this Advent, much of what happened at His birth was a foretelling of His life and ministry. Now we see that God, nor Jesus, demand riches, gold, fine linen. No, what they desire is a sacrifice given in love. For some people 10% is not a real sacrifice, it is just a portion of their abundance. For others 5% is a major offering from their living. *Mark 12: 43 Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. 44 They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”*

A few Sundays ago, I said Jesus can do great things with a little given in great faith. As you continue in Advent and preparing for the coming of Jesus, what is He calling you to give in the way of your time, talents and tithing? Do you give of your abundance or your living?

Stewardship is a major part of our Christian life. When we give of our living rather than abundance, we are then truly trusting Jesus to take care of us.

THURSDAY December 20, 2018

Mary

Luke 1:31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.

I wonder if Mary thought: Lord isn't it bad enough I am single and pregnant? Now you want me to name Him Jesus! So what is so wrong with calling Him Jesus? No one else in the family was named Jesus. Normally a child, especially a male child, is named after his father. Since she was supposed to marry a man named Joseph this was a very odd, and improper, choice for a name.

The name Jesus seemed to imply that the father's name was a form of the name Joshua. In Hebrew His name is Yeshua, which is related to the name Joshua. Now everyone would know Joseph had nothing to do with the conception. But He had to be called: Yeshua. If you look at the meaning of His name, it means to rescue or deliver. What better name for the one who came to deliver us from our sins and rescue us from death. So, once again, Mary defies the world and tradition to follow the path God laid out for her.

This is a very important lesson for such a time as this. In a time when the world is becoming more accepting of things that are not of God, when many sins are no longer considered sins but rather the norm, believers will find themselves at odds with the world more than ever. In a time when the church is giving in to the ways of the world, many believers will find themselves at odds with their own church. Like Mary, we must decide where we will stand. Will we stand against God and His Word to be popular; or will we stand strong in the Word of God knowing it is the truth, the way and the life. We know Mary's life was not easy after her pregnancy became known to everyone. But we also know God made sure she was safe, and Jesus was delivered safe and kept secure on that silent night.

FRIDAY December 21, 2018

Mary

Luke 2:42 When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom. 43 After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. 44 Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. 45 When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. 46 After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.

How did they not know Jesus wasn't with them? In those days men and women did not travel together. ½ of the men traveled in the front, then women and children in the middle, and the other ½ of the men were traveling in the back. This was to protect the woman and children. So, it is possible that Mary thought Jesus was with His father. He was now twelve and had gone through his Bar mitzvah, therefore He was considered a man. But it is possible that Joseph thought Jesus was with Mary. After all a boy stayed with his mom for the first 12 years of his life and Joseph may have thought Jesus was traveling with Mary because he was so used to being with her. Since they were not traveling together, they would not have known that Jesus was not with either of them, or with any family members, until they stopped for the evening and Joseph made his way back to where Mary was traveling. So that is one day that Jesus has been gone. Verse 46 says they did not find Jesus until the 3rd day of searching. That is a total of 4 days Jesus was "missing".

So where did Jesus stay for 4 days? What did He eat? Where did He sleep. Notice Mary did not ask any of these questions when they found Him. Why? Because Jesus said He was about His Father's business and Mary knew God had taken care of Jesus, just as God took care of her when she was single and pregnant. For the second time in Mary's life God has shown His power to take care of someone who has answered His call on their life. For the second time God has provided a way for His plan to be accomplished in the world.

When we answer the call of God on our life, God will also provide the things we need to answer His call and serve Him.

SATURDAY December 22, 2018

Mary

Luke 2:6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

Mary is somewhere between the ages of 13-15, according to most scholars. She has traveled for 3 days from Nazareth to Bethlehem. She has given birth to Jesus in a kataluma, a guest house, in Bethlehem, away from her family and friends. We know she spent 6 months with her cousin Elizabeth when first becoming pregnant. However, not even Elizabeth was there.

I have no idea what went on that night. I don't know if it was a comfortable place or on a dirt floor. I don't know if there were midwives helping her or if it was just her and Joseph there. But I know this: God was there for the birth of His son and the Holy Spirit was there and, of course, Jesus was there.

There are times in our lives where we feel so alone. There are times when we can be in a room full of people and still feel lonely. There are times when we may think no one loves us and there may even be times when it seems easier to die than to live. But you are not alone. Mary was not alone, Joseph was not alone, the holy Trinity was there in that place that night. The Holy Trinity is with us always as well. Yes, we write the ending of our stories here on earth but God has already written the end of time. We win! It may not always feel like you or the church is winning, but trust me, in the end: we win.

Mark 13: 24 "But in those days, following that distress, " 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; 25 the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' 26 "At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. 27 And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

Have you spent Advent getting ready? Are you ready for Jesus to come again?

MONDAY CHRISTMAS EVE, 2018

THE CHRIST CHILD

Luke 2:6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born,

We have no idea what Mary did on the eve before the birth of Jesus. Maybe she was in labor, maybe it was a short labor. The truth is: we don't know.

But we know this. In Bethlehem of Judah, during the evening of one night, a small Child was born. I suspected He looked like any other new born baby boy. He was the pride of His dad, both Joseph and God, and He was the love of His mothers' heart. Her life would never be the same. In fact, her life had not been the same since she was told she was going to have a Child and He would be called Emmanuel, wonderful counselor, Son of the everlasting God. Some wanted her dead for shaming the tribe and her family for becoming pregnant before getting married. Elizabeth celebrated with her and even knew the Son of Mary was to be greater than her own son. *Luke 1:41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.*

Mary knew the wonder of what was happening, and she treasured all these things in her heart. All she needed to know was she was doing the will of God and everything else would be ok. Can you imagine being so brave so young.

I am sure by this time it has been a long hard Christmas for many people. Between the parties, stressing over gifts and worried about all the cooking and family coming to the house, travel expenses and everything else that goes along with a busy Christmas season. By now you may even be glad it is almost over.

But my prayer for you on this Christmas Eve: Remember how brave a young mother was to bring you a Savior. Never let all that is going on cause you to lose the joy of Christmas. Never forget that small Child in a manger. Never let the world make you lose your sense of wonder and peace that comes from knowing Jesus Christs. Most of all May this day and Christmas Day remind you of the joy of Christ and may this time bring peace and grace to your heart. **AMEN**