

12/24 - "The Journey of Christ 1"

Isaiah 9:6

6 For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.

And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Luke 2:11-12

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."

Special Music: "Joy to the World (Joyful, Joyful)" Phil Wickham

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3vnB8xAqzjE>



Take a Peek

**What's that light coming
'Neath the door of the stable?
Someone's inside, Unable
To find respite
From the cold of the night.
Who can it be,
Who has no place to rest
On this night of all nights,
With wonder now manifested
Within these walls
And hallowed halls?
Let us crack the door
And take a peek.**

**In the soft glow of lantern light
Shadows mark the dark of night.
A man stands near,
Dirty robes, staff in hand,
Wrinkled face and skin so tanned.
He looks at us so ever brief
And in his eyes we find relief.
Here inside these stable walls
Amidst the hay and cattle stalls,
He's found a place for all to rest
A father who gained some peace
A burden lifted in sweet release
So very strong, yet also very meek**

And there, in the hay nearby
A girl, a mother, no more a child,
Singing softly, a lullaby
Reconciled
Light reflecting from her eyes
Soft and blue like summer skies.
Weary, she has traveled far
To deliver a babe beneath the star.
A light among all to shine
From our Creator, God Divine
She weeps, she smiles,
Remembering triumphs and hardship trials
As joy o'ercomes the bleak.

And in a manger filled with hay,
The cries and coos sing out
Let us bow our head and pray
For a child has come to bring about
The sinner's salvation,
A revelation,
An encapsulation
Of a new covenant
Between God and the people souls,
A sacrifice to make them whole,
To bring understanding
Without condemnation
To make the weak strong
And To make the strong the weak.

**So, let us sing a new song
A bright and glorious song
Sing is loud and sing it long
To make right all that's wrong
To show love and grace
To every face
Lift the souls of all the fallen
Bring peace to all the crestfallen
For unto us a child is born
Yes, unto us a child is born
For unto us a child is given
For unto us our sins forgiven
Let us turn our eyes and hearts to heaven**

And seek the child.

When my eldest son was born, it changed me. But the truth is, that didn't happen just to me. Children change us. Every one of us. I looked into the face of my new-born son as I held him in my arms and cried tears of joy while feeling the weight of being a father slowly descending on my shoulders. The docs told us that my son would probably not live more than a day or two. He was very, very sick. The pediatrician did his best to explain to me that if the disease did not kill him, the antibiotics they were giving him probably would. But God knew that the world needed my son, and so he lived. And I changed.

People don't all feel the same way the moment when a child is born. Some embrace the new responsibility with fervor. Others flee in terror because they feel overwhelmed. Adding a new human to the family dynamic means more compromise, lost sleep, rearranging schedules, taking more time off from work, helping with errands and doctor's visits. It even changes the relationship between the father and the mother. Most of the time they draw closer together as they accept their roles in raising a child. Others drift apart. Change is hard. But if you want a strong family, change is a must. Selfishness must be set aside and priorities have to be rearranged to accommodate everyone involved.

I love my son and the man he has grown to be. He has a family of his own now, and I am blessed with three grandsons. I look back and think about how it almost wasn't like this, how close we came to losing him before he had an opportunity to become a father himself. But either way, his birth would still have changed my world forever.

I think about what it must have been like for Joseph. He had no idea of what was ahead as he put Mary on that donkey, knowing what a hard trip it was going to be for her and that unborn child. So many things must have been running through his mind. While the angel had brought him some answers, the angel also raised new questions regarding Joseph's relationship with both Mary and her child. We have no way of knowing just what he was feeling as they arrived in Bethlehem four days later only to find there was no place to stay, knowing that the child that God had made him responsible for, would be born in a barn. Yet, here they were. Surrounded by animals in a drafty stable with only hay for beds and his new-born baby with no place to lay except in a feed trough. And what would discourage many of us, made us totally distraught. Yet, the circumstances didn't take overtake in Joseph's soul as he looked around him and could only be astounded about what had just come about. The circumstances that would have made so many of us turn in fear, only made Joseph stronger and more engaged with the miracle that he was a part of.

We have to ask ourselves why were so few privy to this moment as the Son of God, the Messiah, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace entered into his own Creation to serve us, to save us, to love us. Why were the shepherds, the townspeople, and eventually the wise men the only ones to recognize that this moment was a miracle to be embraced and how blessed they were to be a part of it? Why did the choir of angels sing out in the countryside where only the shepherds could hear? Why did no one seem to realize what was happening in this drafty barn in Bethlehem? If so many were

begging for the Messiah to come, why did so few show up when he did? If the Israelites were so looking forward to being freed of the oppression of the Romans, why weren't they more excited when he showed up?

Because a baby lying on hay in a feed trough inside a cattle barn was not what they were expecting. This was not the solution that they had prepared for. They were looking for a king, born in a palace, surrounded by wealth. A warrior, born with a sword in his hand that would rally Israel to throw off the yoke of the Romans and return Israel to its former glory. A baby born to a poor carpenter who wasn't the father of the child, a mother no more than a child herself giving birth in the lowliest of circumstances, this kind of a miracle wasn't even on the people's radar. The people were looking for a human response from God rather than a Godly response in the guise of a human. They were looking for a material solution when God gifted them with a spiritual solution. The arrival of Jesus just didn't meet the standards that they were being taught in the synagogues, the temple, or even in the written materials passed down through generations. They were looking in the wrong direction for salvation and were so distracted that they were unable to grasp the miracle as it unfolded.

Yet, Jesus was the salvation promised even if they couldn't see it. They had become so reliant on a human interpretation of this God event, they couldn't envision the event that was happening around them.

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Isaiah 7:14

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Isaiah 53

1 Who has believed our message

and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

2 He grew up before him like a tender shoot,

and like a root out of dry ground.

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,

nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

3 He was despised and rejected by mankind,

a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.

Like one from whom people hide their faces

he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

4 Surely he took up our pain

and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.

6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away.
Yet who of his generation protested?

For he was cut off from the land of the living;
for the transgression of my people he was punished.

9 He was assigned a grave with the wicked,
and with the rich in his death,
though he had done no violence,
nor was any deceit in his mouth.

10 Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,
and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin,
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,
and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.

11 After he has suffered,
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,
and he will bear their iniquities.

12 Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,
because he poured out his life unto death,
and was numbered with the transgressors.

For he bore the sin of many,

and made intercession for the transgressors.

And yet, this kind of salvation, this savior, this redeemer was not what was expected. So, no, they were not ready for or expecting this kind of Messiah. And no, they were not looking for him in the place where he came to be delivered.

And so, his arrival among us was relatively quiet. While everyone was expecting Jesus to march through the front door, Jesus quietly entered humbly through the servant's entrance, ready to serve God's children in ways they were not expecting. Genuinely, people were ready to follow the Messiah into battle, swords and shields raised, without ever realizing that the battle was within their very own souls.

Today, Bethlehem can be found within the boundaries of Palestine. This year, there are few visitors because of the war. As a matter of fact, the local shops and residents have forgone celebrating Christmas this year at all. In the 1960's, Bethlehem was 80% Christian. Today, it is predominantly Muslim. While still considered a must-see for travelers, the tiny alcove believed to be the actual place where Jesus was born, which resides inside the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, usually crowded with visitors, is empty today amidst the sounds of gunfire and bombs. There just aren't many people willing to risk their lives to journey to Bethlehem this year. And it reminds me of Joseph saddling up that donkey so that he and Mary could make that arduous journey 2000 years ago, knowing how difficult it was going to be.

Things change. Life changes. Even the things that we consider most important change. But such is the nature of Creation. What we think of as being permanent, usually isn't. The only unchanging thing in this world is God's love for each of us. God never intended for our lives to remain unchanged as the world changes around us. The more things change around us the more God expects us to grow closer to him. It's not our job to take on the world alone, it is our job to reflect the nature of Christ to everyone we encounter, to help them become acquainted with the rock of our faith, our Creator.

Christmas is upon us as we celebrate the birth of the Christ child in that stable, oh, so long ago. What a wonder that after 2000 years we still celebrate, even though so few attended that first Christmas. As we gather friends and family around us, let us take the time to share with each other how much this celebration event means to us, how much Christ means to us. Don't let the day pass with Jesus on the sidelines. Let us make him the focus of our celebration. Let us envision ourselves in that barn with the shepherds and the animals. Embrace the lanterns and the shadows that reveal the first Nativity. Let us be grateful for the sacrifices of Joseph as Mary, the shepherds and the wisemen. And let us fix our eyes on that tiny baby in a feeding trough who came to change the world, redeem the world, make our spirits whole, and bring us into the presence of our Creator. Let us respond to his love and grace as we realize that he came knowing exactly what was ahead of him, knowing that his purpose and his joy was in loving us so much he was willing to die for us.

God bless you all! AMEN

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