

Matthew 1.v18-25 - Give More

Intro:

What is the Story of Christmas?

It can seem like it's about Santa, sleigh bells, Christmas trees, presents – buying and giving. It can be about being naughty or nice – and you better be nice cause Santa Claus is coming to town. It's about the Queens speech, turkey, pigs in blankets, family, friends, parties and celebration – but what are people celebrating?

Do they know?

//

For some the season is about more about war - because there is also the story about the war on Christmas, how we've lost the meaning of Christmas to the big retailers and to Santa and so Christians need to combat this narrative and go to war with how the story is being told and how it should be celebrated.

//

But hold on, do I, do we need to declare war on Christmas?

//

No.

//

So what to do?

If you think about it, to be a prophetic voice at this time all you have to do is very simply tell the actual story.

Just tell the story, from the Bible, and try to think of how to celebrate that story.

Its startling how the story sounds when you just tell it like it is. Its joyful, tragic, dark, hopeful, and a bit unsettling.

Why?

Because it sounds like real life.

And so, we begin with the beginning.

//

Matthew 1:1- 25 is the long list of names, the genealogy of Jesus. Israel as a nation has had its ups and downs, its good leaders and its bad leaders.

In the time of the nativity, Israel is under Roman occupation, and are waiting for God to move...

Waiting for God to raise up a leader from the genealogy of King David. There is the expectation that a good king, a saviour, will come. It indicates who Jesus will be – a king from the line of David, who will bring God’s favour back to Israel. And so the story shifts from the genealogy to this little couple...

Matthew 1:18-19 (NIV)

Joseph Accepts Jesus as His Son

¹⁸This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about^(a): 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.

¹⁹Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet^(b) did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

So the story of Christmas, the story of salvation begins with a betrothed couple. Mary and Joseph; pre-wedding; and Joseph finds out that Mary is pregnant.

A real dilemma for Joseph, grounds for divorce that could ruin Mary’s life and could cause him shame and dishonour.

So what to do?

Joseph’s initial thought is to divorce Mary quietly; to not make a scene, to not shame the woman he clearly loves.

So, the first part of God’s story to save humanity starts in thoughts of divorce. Sounds like real life...

But... We read on

Matthew 1:20-25 (NIV)

²⁰But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is

from the Holy Spirit. 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”).

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

So, an angel comes to Joseph in a dream... *“don’t be scared. It’s OK. Mary is in God’s hands – you too. Let me explain... this is a baby, a child of God.”*

And so, Joseph gets to hear the name the child will be given and who He will be – the saviour. He finds out that an Ancient scripture about a Messiah King would be fulfilled. We find out that a virgin will give birth to this King and they will call this child Immanuel, - which means "God with us."

And Joseph is changed – his first thoughts of divorce are dispelled and instead he commits to Mary and her miracle child.

And so, we see the story widen--this is no ordinary pregnancy, this is no ordinary baby.

This baby will be God in the flesh.

//

I spoke in the first week of Advent about the change God makes – We considered the nativity from Luke – from the perspective of Mary as she moved from fear, to confusion and then to worship.

Here in this morning’s reading it is Joseph who moves from confusion, and maybe anger at Mary’s pregnancy, to fear and then to clarity of understanding as God reveals his plan

//

God is amazing, beyond our comprehension, yet reveals himself in such an ordinary way – as a baby, but no ordinary baby... God says this is the highest revelation that man will ever see of God,

The author of Hebrews puts it this way:

"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world." Hebrews 1:1-2

In the past God spoke in many ways, but now he has finally spoken through Jesus.

Jesus is the fulfillment of God's revelation. So, we have this reality of God with us in the form of a wee child.

Fascinating really.

God puts himself at the mercy of a young girl, and a new husband. God enters life as a human. God with us.

//

That is how the story starts; no reindeer, no snowmen, no thunder, no pillars of fire, just a thought of divorce, a dream, and a baby, come to be with us, Immanuel.

And so yes, it is a simple story that cuts through all the distractions of this season because it is a story full of wonder.

//

Have you ever asked the question – God where are you, cried out to hear him, to know him, for him to intercede?

//

If you have – then the answer is Jesus. That is where we find God.

The wonder of the incarnation communicates so much, but at its core it is answers that very simple and deep question...

God where are you?

And his answer is: *"I'm here with you. In this life. I'm not some far off being, I am here among you.*

I know what it's like to be you. In your humanity, in your joy, in your suffering.

I know what it's like to live this life. And I want to be with you. In this Life."

God are you with me?

And God answers very deeply, yes I am with you.

He longs for your life to be lived with him – in relationship with.

It can be very simple and very powerful when you are fully present to someone, it fulfills a deep desire of our heart.

//

So, what does giving of ourselves look like.

//

In marriage do we truly give of ourselves in relationship – saying I betroth myself to you, in sickness and in health, for better and for worse, for richer and for poorer – till death us do part. Do we truly and selflessly give to our other?

In family do we truly give of ourselves in relationship – **parent** to child, fulfilling their need for nurture, for comfort, love and protection. **As children**, do we honour our parents, support them, and walk their journey as a loving, caring child.

In life do we lay down our own life, in service to others?

What about the three who chased down the man on London Bridge? Putting themselves and their safety before that of others?

What about serving faithfully as Jesus served – in church, in charity, giving sacrificially of our time, talent and yes, our money.

//

What or whose example are we following in life?

//

Are we acknowledging the actual story of Christmas – knowing that to simply give the gift of your presence. Be with someone is the best we can give?

//

So, this year can we try to spend less on presents and give more of our selves.

It's the story of what God did, he came to be with us, and so can we celebrate by giving relational gifts.

//

Specifically, during this season of advent, can we be intentionally present. First to ourselves and then to other people.

//

Technology is making it easier and easier to be present but not be with. We're halfway present, being present with our body but not with our whole relational selves.

It's not unusual to be in a crowd full of people and for everyone to be distracted, in their own world, on their phone.

The French-Swiss artist, Antoine Geiger had an installation called "Sur-Fake" that captured this really well.

He says----basically technology is pulling us out of the moment, out of relationship and even away from our own thoughts, instead of being quiet with ourselves and thinking and working something out in thought and prayer, we just distract ourselves with a phone.

//

I'm not getting all anti phone, but ask what would it look like to have a phone fast each day – to celebrate God Immanuel?

Temporarily, turning off social media apps.

Maybe have a spot where you put your phone as soon as you walk into the house and leave it there – so as not to be distracted?

When the urge to reach for your phone comes, why not instead spend a moment in reflection and prayer.

Or, ask your friends or spouse or kids a question, or play, cook, talk, run... just don't be alone with your phone.

Why not use the time to brainstorm the relational gifts you can give this Christmas as you spend less and give more.

Maybe for you it's not the phone, maybe it's the TV, or work or something else that doesn't need to be done right this moment - let's try to stop, and celebrate God with us, by being with each other and being with him.

//

The coming Jesus teaches us how to see?

He said in the synagogue in Nazareth, quoting from the prophet Isaiah

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,

because he has anointed me

to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners

and recovery of sight for the blind,

to set the oppressed free,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." [Luke 4.18-19a)

When Jesus comes into our hearts, he opens our eyes to see the things as they truly are – that God gave himself in the person of Jesus, born a baby – that He would die on a cross that we might be forgiven; that He would rise to life that we too might have life, in all its fullness.

//

What are you prepared to give this Christmas?

Amen