

Pondering the Meaning of the Story

The story of inquisitive travellers who missed the meaning of the moment at hand and who were impoverished at a spiritual and emotional level as a result. Quote David Brooks: "In the Hermitage we paused momentarily in front of Rembrandt's masterpiece "The Return of the Prodigal Son."...

The painting is a masterpiece, emotionally gripping and morally complex. But on this tour, we talked about none of its meanings. The guide did not tell the story. There really was no time to pause before the passion. The painting was just another notable thing to notice on the way to a dozen more notable things. It left no mark."

Most of us are aware of the Christmas story, yet it is possible in the busyness and noise of daily life to fail to grasp the meaning and relevance of the story. It is possible to yawn our way through the Christmas season because we are familiar with the story. But...are we gripped afresh by the wonder, meaning and relevance of the story of the birth of Jesus? Are we taking time to 'pause before the passion' of God's love in sending his Son to our planet? Let's step into the lives of those integral to the Christmas story and see if the questions they asked are pertinent to us.

Mary's Story and Unexpected Plot Twists: Luke 1:26-34

Some background: Gabriel the angel sent by God with a specific message for Mary. Gabriel is one of only two angels named in Scripture. The other one? Michael the archangel. The name Gabriel can mean two things...'God is my hero' or 'mighty man of God.'

Gabriel speaks words of thoughtful reassurance. Vs.28-30 A little more background! Mary is a virgin, pledged to be married to a man named Joseph. In a sense 'legally married' but without physical consummation. She is a virgin.

Now, this is where things get very interesting! Vss. 31-34. The angel informs Mary that she will become pregnant and give birth to the Son of God. Mmm. If you are Mary that statement will give you pause for thought! She doesn't have to worry about working through a list of names and making a choice. "You are to call him Jesus." Vs.31. Gabriel gives further details about her son. Vss.32-33

As a young Jewish woman she was well acquainted with ancient prophecies regarding the promised Messiah. Eg. Isaiah 7:14, 53, Micah 5:2. The name and titles given to the baby are massively important to understand the Christmas story accurately.

The name Jesus means 'the LORD saves'...the Greek form of the name Joshua. Consider Matthew 1:21 "he will save his people from their sins." The name reveals his life and death purpose. Further: "he will be great and be called the Son of the Most High." Jesus is "the divine Son of God and the (promised) Messiah born in his time... Most High, a title frequently used of God in the OT and NT...the Messiah descended from David (Psalm 2:6-7 and Isaiah 9:6-7)...his kingdom will never end."

And his kingdom is first and foremost a place of authority, leadership and love in the human heart. Yours include, if you are willing to respond to him.

Pause and Ponder: The Questions Christmas Answers:

Question# 1: Who is this baby laid in a manger?

This baby is the fulfillment of the promise of God to provide a Saviour from sin. A Saviour for you and me. Will you thoughtfully consider the name given, Jesus? Will you consider the meaning of the name and the relevance to you? Will you investigate the story as revealed in the Bible? Will you ask questions of people you trust so that...and this is huge...that you would consider asking Jesus to forgive you of your sins and reconnect you with God the Father in a personal way?

Question # 2: How will this birth come about given Mary is a virgin? Luke 1:34-37. A legitimate question is posed by Mary. Gabriel answers her in a clear and direct manner. God will perform a miracle. God will intervene. Will you and I believe that God intervenes in human history...or not? This is where faith comes into play. Not a blind/unthinking belief, but a thoughtful faith that gives room for the existence and powerful and purposeful activity of God in human history. That embraces supernatural reality.

Question # 3: Why does God intervene in this way? Love for people, one at a time like you and me.
John 3:16-17. *“For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only son...”*

Mary’s Response: Luke 1:38-39

Thoughtful submission to the authority and purpose of God that involves her. This is amazing, knowing that eyebrows will be raised, the scent of scandal trailing her, yet a resolve to trust God and do his bidding as utterly unexpected and mind boggling as it is.

Now...the Question Christmas Asks

What will you make of this story found in the Bible? What will you do with this person called Jesus and the offer of forgiveness of sins extended to you? What next steps will you take in your spiritual journey of investigation and inquiry?

As a follower of Jesus, how goes your availability and obedience to God’s call currently? What can you learn about faith and obedience from the life of Mary in hard to imagine circumstances?

We want to invite you to pause and ponder the passion and purpose of God’s great love in sending his son...the Word made flesh...Jesus revealing God the Father to us. John 1:14-18.

Let this Christmas season be thoughtfully reflected upon and pondered...moving you to consider Jesus, to believe in Jesus, to follow Jesus in the journey of life, a following marked by faith, hope and love, ready to help others find answers to their questions.

The Drive Home

Message Series: **The Questions Christmas Answers**

Message Title: **Mary’s Dilemma...and The Questions Christmas Asks**

Date: Sunday, December 2, 2018

CONNECT:

1. What unexpected news have you received that turned out to be life changing?

ENGAGE:

1. Why do we sometimes take the Christmas story for granted...or at least aren't deeply moved? Why is that?
2. Try to describe how Mary felt and what she was trying to process when the angel spoke to her. Luke 1: 26-34
What implications did Mary have to face?
3. Ponder the Passion of God's love in the name given to the baby...Jesus (vs. 31). How is this name relevant to you?
4. The Questions Christmas answers:
 - a. Who is this baby laid in a manger? Back to his name!
 - b. How will this birth happen? Do we give room for the supernatural...or not?
 - c. Why did God send his son? Consider John 3:16-17

What answers mean the world to you and why? Who in your world needs to consider the story and consider the questions and answers? Consider and pray through Colossians 4:2-6.

5. The Questions Christmas Asks...of you and me:
Notice Mary's response. Luke 1:38 How would you describe her response to God's message?

What will you do with this Christmas message? What will you do with this person called Jesus and his offer of forgiveness and a life of relationship, purpose and service?

What one truth/insight do you take away from this encounter with Mary in the Christmas story?