

## There's a Miracle in Your Mess

### **Luke 1:26-31; 2:1-12**

The most wonderful part of the Christmas story is the selection of humble Mary to become the mother of the Messiah. Christmas is often thought of in terms of emotional warmth, security, and the spirit of giving. Plays and movies condemn the “scrooge” in us and embrace the Christmas spirit, similar to a Christ-like harmony with those around us. Peace on earth is often magnified as well.

The story of the birth of Jesus can be a study of contrasts. After Mary’s acceptance of the promise of Jesus’ birth, everything becomes chaotic and her life becomes a mess. No doubt, Mary had to remind herself that there was a miracle in her mess. In this respect, Mary is just like the rest of us. God has a purpose for us — something unique and special. Unfortunately, the mess surrounding the blessing (our miracle) often obscures it from our view. Therefore, the message today is intended to help you see the miracle God has given you and provide guidelines so that you can be a good steward of your miracle.

Just like baby Jesus, most of our miracles don’t come full-grown, they have to be carefully guarded and nurtured. I want to help you discover your emerging miracle and develop it. Discovery may involve assigning value to a gift or experience in our lives. Discovery is hearing that you’re pregnant and deciding to keep the child and celebrate its coming. Imagine if Mary would have aborted the baby Jesus because of the social stigma surrounding His birth. What a tragedy that would have been!

Similarly, discovering the gift alone is not enough. Mary had to raise her child safely to adulthood in order to become a heroine of the faith. The same is true of us. God’s miracle may be in our house, but if we aren’t able to identify it as such, and develop it, the gift never brings the full blessing God intended to either the world or ourselves.

Figuratively speaking, many of us have been impregnated by God. There is a dream, a business, a ministry, a book, a record, or some great work that He is growing within us. Unfortunately for the average person, spiritual pregnancies are even more difficult to handle than natural births. The message of Christmas can help you deal with the contradiction of your inner reality and your external circumstances.

### **The Mess**

Looking at Luke 2, it is easy to see that Mary and Joseph were in trouble. Their bright-eyed child was not born in a palace. He was born in a manger — a cradle for food for horses. Justin Martyr believed that the place of Jesus’ birth was actually a cave full of horses, donkeys, and their food.

There were three types of messes in which the chosen couple found themselves.

First, Mary and Joseph were in a **marital mess**. Mary became pregnant during their betrothal period. Under the Old Testament covenant, a girl could have been killed or stoned for such a thing. Joseph was so confused about the situation that he was considering a quiet annulment until an angel appeared to him in dream (Matt. 1:20). In like manner, many

people experience difficulties in their marriages at pivotal points in their journey. Conflict, communication issues, or even sexual problems do not portend that a marriage has to fail. Sometimes prayer alone will turn things around. Other times counselling, coaching, and reading must be added to the mix to bring healing.

Second, Joseph and Mary had a **financial** mess. Although, the newlyweds had enough money to pay their taxes, tradition paints the scene of Jesus' birth as lowly and poor. Mary is pregnant for the first time. Not anticipating the timing of Jesus' birth well, she didn't expect to find herself stranded in a strange town without her mother or other members of her support system.

One cannot help wondering whether a room really would have been available if they had more money. Certainly without cash, the manger had to suffice — there was nowhere else to go. The smell of the horses, donkeys, and nearby livestock would have been overwhelming. This was not the most positive environment in the world! I would have felt trapped — just like I did when the bank repossessed my late model car during my first year in graduate school.

The third mess they faced was a **political/military** mess. The Roman Empire had essentially colonized Israel, yet King Herod feared that someone would rise up from among his people to depose him.

### **The Power of Favour**

In Luke 1, the angel announced to Mary, "Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you." He tells her that she is favoured among women. Mary responds, "Be it unto me, according to thy word." This exchange demonstrates that God is the ultimate gentleman. He gives us a right of first refusal for difficult assignments. Mary could have said, "No thanks! Ask me again when the next great leader is supposed to be born." Instead of denial, she answered the call and then was selected to do the job. Perhaps this kind of circumstance illustrates Jesus' proverb, "Many are called but few are chosen" (Matthew 20:16; 22:14).

After saying "yes" to her mission impossible, Mary is qualified to experience the favour of God. The word favour means that she has found grace from God. It is important for us to remember that whenever God calls us to a special task, He gives a special grace to accomplish His will.

This grace has two dimensions according to Philippians 2:13 — envisioning power and accomplishing power. Paul says it this way, "For God is working in you, giving you the desire to obey him and the power to do what pleases him" (NLT). As we work under the direction and energy of God, He will also allow some strategic persons to recognize and assist in our God-given call. Yet, grace or favour does not give us bragging rights. It cannot be worn as a badge. Favour is not given to us for our own purposes. Favour is given to us for God's purposes.

### **Prophetic Inconvenience**

There were many Old Testament prophecies that pointed to the birth of Christ. These prophecies concerning the Messiah ultimately became proof for our generation that Jesus

was the One we awaited. What a reassurance they are to us of the foreknowledge and faithfulness of God.

To the confused parents of Jesus, they were pushed circumstantially into these prophetic fulfillments. The need to pay taxes, no room at the inn, and a midnight dream given to Joseph all form part of the process God used to position the young couple for their unique role in Jesus' life. The path they followed was irregular to them, yet it was a part of God answering prayers and keeping promises made to a previous generation.

In real estate it is often said that there are only three things that matter — location, location, location. In God's kingdom, we must be at the right place, at the right time, doing the right thing to experience the full blessing of God.

### **The Right Place**

Micah spoke the prediction: "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." (Micah 5:2 NIV)

It is no wonder that Herod got nervous after reading this word. Ironically, since neither Mary nor Joseph was from that town, God used the Roman tax system to relocate Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem expressly for the birth. Some scholars, like A.T. Robertson, even believe that both Mary and Joseph were descendants of King David — thus requiring both of them to go to the same specified tax location.

As a result of Joseph's "tax problem," he had to jostle his family. To say that this was an inconvenience would be putting it mildly. In like manner we ask ourselves, "Why is the Lord taking such a circuitous route to my destiny?" We are frequently like a child on a long car trip — wanting to take bathroom breaks every few miles. Our agonizing cries seemingly fall on deaf ears, as we repeat the phrase, "Are we there yet?" like a mantra.

Despite our dislike of the process, the Lord rarely confers with us about the direction. He simply lays out His plan and leads us to the right place.

### **The Right Time**

God knew just the right time for Jesus' birth. Keeping His timetable meant planning ahead. The Lord not only determined Jesus' parents, he also established their family tribe and region. Despite His exhaustive preplanning, when God moves it can seem chaotic and disconcerting. Mary and Joseph had to have felt that things were moving too fast.

### **The Right Thing**

It is possible to be in the right place at the right time, yet be puzzled about what to do. How do you raise the Deliverer of the world? Is there a special trick to changing the Messiah's swaddling clothes? I certainly hope not. On other hand, it would be difficult to know what to tell Jesus about His life's calling as He was growing up.

Part of doing the right thing is to understand how to handle emergency situations. After the wise men from the East came to worship Jesus, they purposely did not report back to Herod. It is possible they told Joseph of their concern about his nation's leader. Such knowledge would have thrown the new dad into frenzy. For Joseph, operational wisdom came by receiving clear guidance of how to sidestep Herod's plan to kill his child. Once again, an Old Testament prophecy (Hosea 11:1) became the foundational redirection or inconvenience that influenced the carpenter's family.

Matt. 2:12-16 tells us the process: “And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way. And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, ‘Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.’ When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, ‘Out of Egypt have I called my son.’ Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked by the wise men, was exceeding angry, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem.”

Joseph was in the right place at the right time and he managed to also do the right thing in a crisis. This must have seemed like an illogical directive from God. Jesus, the Saviour of the Jewish people, was sent back to Egypt. Let’s remember that Egypt represented slavery and oppression to the Israelites. If Joseph had not listened to God promptly and obeyed explicitly, the baby would not have survived.

If we were able to look ahead to see dangers up the road, and figure out the perfect next move on the multiple dimensional chessboard of human response, then we might be able to lean to our own understanding. But we don’t have that ability. Sometimes what looks like a detour or a delay is nothing but the Lord arranging the perfect answer to a sticky situation. As you look at the many problems surrounding you, your family or your church, don’t be overwhelmed. Sift through the rubbish and debris around you until you spot it! Spot what? Spot the miracle! It’s hidden there somewhere. The miracle is in your mess.