

The Core of Christmas

Luke 2:22-40

In our culture, we talk a lot about the lofty side of the Christmas account: sweet little baby Jesus, angels singing, and gifts offered by wise men. However, the story as a whole has more than just delightful moments. It has chaotic and alarming episodes. The first Christmas was a very complex time for those implicated in the narrative. Think about it! The narrative telling the birth of Jesus resembles many aspects of the brokenness of our world.

For instance, Luke opens the narrative with the display of an older couple, Zechariah and Elizabeth, who had been dealing with infertility for many years. Zechariah received the news that he was going to have a son, and immediately, he lost his voice for more than 9 months. It is not hard to picture Zechariah thinking to himself, “Nothing in life is complete, is it? I was childless, and now that I am going to have a son, I become voiceless.” Then Luke’s camera captures Mary, an unmarried teenage girl, receiving the news of an unexpected pregnancy and embarking on an 80-mile trip; a journey that had a set of complications in itself.

Matthew presents before us the scene of Joseph, the man who felt terribly betrayed and was secretly planning to leave Mary. Matthew zooms in on the potential breakup, another critical moment in the narrative. Things were going from bad to worse; a young and pregnant adolescent facing a divorce before the consummation of the marriage. Imagine what that meant in such an era: Death by stoning was a possibility; Mary becoming the juicy gossip of town was a given. Consequently, this is a possible explanation for Mary’s trip of more than three months to Judea.

Then, Luke sets before his audience the royal edict, “everyone had to go to their own town to register” (Luke 2:3). A long journey to Bethlehem ensued when pregnant Mary was not physically fit to be part of an expedition crew. Upon their arrival, we hear of the inhospitality of the people in town. No one was willing to give a guest room to a woman experiencing an extreme situation. Not even a bed was available, and Mary’s firstborn had to be laid in a feeding trough.

Today, we read how Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple to be presented as it was required in the Jewish culture. And even though we hear a lot of good things in Simeon’s intervention, we also hear of the painful reality that Jesus and his earthly family were to experience. *“This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that **will be spoken against**, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And **a sword will pierce your own soul too**”* (Luke 2:34-35).

The troubles did not end at the manger. The difficulties were not only presented in the words of Simeon. Shortly after, a very insecure ruler, Herod, gave the order: “kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity” (Matthew 2:16). And, Mary and Joseph had to migrate to Egypt to protect the life of the little one.

As you can see, the Christmas account is full of nuisances: an empire taking a census, a couple traveling, no room available, cheerful angels singing, fearful shepherds sprinting. We remember the unyielding, committed response of Mary, but we also remember the half-hearted reaction of Zechariah and the inner struggle of Joseph.

As we remember, we come face to face with the truth that Christ came for everyone: for people who are full of faith, for people who are very afraid. Christ has come for people who are celebrating, as well as for those who are hesitating. Christ has come for each and every one of us: for doubters and those in the middle of downers.

Yes, as we look at the raw, not-sanitized Christmas story, we come face to face with issues of violence, immigration, power struggles, physical limitations, difficulties in relationships, distrust and hopelessness. Does it sound familiar? Have you heard about those issues lately? I am pretty sure you have.

I love the fact that Christmas speaks to the concerns we are facing today. I love the fact that amidst troubling situations, Christmas is an episode of hope. God Incarnate, Jesus Christ, was willing to step into our muddy reality to restore our brokenness and bring us abundance of life. Christmas is about God delivering salvation to the world personally.

What do we need to be saved from? We need to be saved from:

- our fears and insecurities
- self-centeredness
- life-sucking preferences and choices
- unbelief, arrogance, and intolerance
- hostility, coercion and manipulation
- harmful, at times self-inflicted and convenient ignorance
- detrimental behaviors and mindsets
- a corrupted state that lead us to adopt less-than-human positions
- brokenness that causes more brokenness

Christmas is not about tinsel and lights, snow covering the ground, gifts under a tree, sentimental memories... Those things are nice. However, the core of Christmas is God bringing salvation to the cosmos. Christmas is about God coming to restore the Divine image on us. At Christmas, “heaven came to earth to bring earth back to heaven.”¹

As God’s chosen people, the celebration of Christmas is the embracing of God’s salvation. It’s the realization that we are saved people who are called to be free from enslaving sin. Christmas

¹ <https://www.stathanasiuswv.org/blog/Deacon-Blog/Why-God-Became-Man>

is a reminder that we don't have to dwell in the shadows of enmity and brokenness. Christmas is a season that reminds us not that we can have more, but that we can become more.

I invite you to ponder on the whole of the Christmas account. As you do so, you will be reminded that God is concerned with and involved in our messy existence. God is redeeming our chaotic reality and making us whole by grace through faith.

I invite you to ponder on the whole of the Christmas story for you to see how God is orchestrating all events and always creating new possibilities for us to experience God's salvation. As you ponder on all the events surrounding the birth of Christ and their intrinsic complexities, you will find glimpses of Divine breakthroughs that will fill you with hope, strength, and courage. Moreover, you will be able to live in the light of God's salvation as you draw strength from the promise Christmas puts before us: God is with us.