

JESUS CHANGED MY LIFE
MARY - He Changed My Story
Advent Worship Series – Week 1
December 2, 2007

WORSHIP SERVICE OUTLINES
 Each worship outline contains all elements needed for your worship service. The order of each service presented is only a *suggestion*. No doubt changes will be needed to accommodate the flow and worship style of your corps. The outlines are flexible and allow opportunities to “cut and paste” as needed. If you are blessed with instrumental or vocal music resources, you may find there is more structured material here than needed. It is recommended that the headings of each section of the service be included in the bulletin.

Announcements and Offering

Call to Worship:

“Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you,” Gabriel said. Seeing her terror, he assured her there was no reason to fear, for the news he brought was wonderful. God had decided to bless her. She would have a son who should be called Jesus. He would be the Son of the Most High, and he would reign over his people forever.

Such a powerful message is unlikely to take hold quickly. Mary, naturally enough, thought about the practical elements rather than the eternal ones. She wanted to know how it was that a virgin could become pregnant. Gabriel patiently explained that the Holy Spirit would miraculously bring forth a child from her, and this child would be the Son of God.

(Why the Nativity?, pages 15-16)

SB#104 – Come, Thou long expected Jesus,	TB-370 – Hyfrydol	HTD1-T14 (3 vs.)
Additional Optional Songs		
SB#100 – Angels, from the realms of glory	TB-398 – Come and Worship (Regent Sq.)	HTD4-T12 (4 vs.)
SB#113 – Joy to the world!	TB-87 – Joy to the World!	HTD4-T9 (3 vs.)
SB#114 – Light of the world HC#146 – Here I am to Worship	TB-653 – Here I am to Worship HC-146	HCD13-T16
SB#103 – Christians awake, salute the happy morn	TB-476 – same	HTD10-T1 (3 vs.)
SB#107 – Hark the glad sound! The Savior comes,	TB-87 – Joy to the World!	D4-T9 (3 vs.)

SB#108 – Hark! The herald angels sing	TB-270 – Hark! The Herald Angels Sing	HTD4-T5 (3 vs.)
HC#141 – All Hail the Power	HC-141	HCD13 –T11
CF#17 – Angels we have heard on high	CF-17	No CD

Responsive Scripture/Candle Lighting:

Solo 1: Come, let us adore him.

Solo 2: Immanuel, God with us.

Leader: The Advent season gives us a chance to slow down and catch our breath, to consider the direction our lives are going, to re-examine our focus. Slowing down to reflect on what it means to be a person of faith can profoundly impact our relationships, our behaviors, our dreams, and ultimately the course of our lives.

[Lighting of the first Advent candle.]

Solo 2: As we light the first candle, we are called to open our hearts to the miracle of Christ's coming and to his plan for our lives.

Leader: Mary was astonished when the angel interrupted her life with the startling announcement that she would be the mother of Jesus. Yet she regrouped and fully opened her heart and life to a radical change of plans.

All: “Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior! For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed.

Leader: For the Mighty One is holy, and he has done great things for me. He sows mercy from generation to generation to all who fear him. His mighty arm has done tremendous things! He has scattered the proud and haughty ones. He has brought down princes from their thrones and exalted the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away with empty hands. He has helped his servant Israel and remembered to be merciful. For he made this promise to our ancestors, to Abraham and his children forever.” (Luke 1:46-55)

All: Lord, help us affirm with Mary, "Let it be with me just as you say."

HC#65 – God Will Make a Way	HC-65	HCD5-T15
Additional Optional Songs		
HC#123 – Shine on Us	HC-123	HCD11-T13
HC#3 – He is Able	HC-3	HCD1-T3
HC#82 – Jesus, Name Above All Names	HC-82	HCD7-T12

HC#72 – Emmanuel	HC-72	HCD6-T12
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[NOTE: It is recommended that either the movie clip *OR* the drama be chosen for the service—*NOT BOTH*.]

Movie Clip



The Nativity Story – The Journey of a Lifetime, a Story for All Time
(Distributed by New Line Home Entertainment)

Scene 7
Start: 19:51 Mary sits by tree
End: 22:04 ...”according to your word”...dove flies away...

Optional Additional Movie Clips

Close to Jesus – The Stories of Those He Touched
Disc 2 – Joseph of Nazareth

(Distributed by Artisan Home Entertainment)

Scene 4 – Handmaid of the Lord
Length: 2:13
Start: 21:54 City Scene
End: 23:48 “...Let it be as you have said”

Jesus of Nazareth (Distributed by Artisan Home Entertainment)

Scene 5 – Message from God
Start: 9:04 Mary sleeping
End: 13:02 “...and I must go and visit her”

Mary of Nazareth (Distributed by Questar, Inc.)

Scene 2 - Handmaiden of the Lord
Start: 8:08 Bread on table
End: 12:38 “...Let it be done to me as you have said”

Drama: Good News/Bad News

Reading:

Consider the change that came about in Mary’s life. Thoughts of marriage turned to thoughts of motherhood, and thoughts of a quiet, ordinary life turned to the anticipation of being at the center of a spectacular miracle from heaven. No wonder God sent Gabriel himself to help her understand and prepare.

Why Mary? Mary herself must have wondered, *Why am I a “favored woman”?* *Why me?* Indeed, the reasons she was chosen are known only to God. But it is clear that she was no random selection.

Mary was favored by God for a task that would finally allow each of us to be favored. Gabriel said, “The Lord is with you,” and as a result, the Lord is with us all. In that way, God sent the ultimate Christmas gift not just to Mary but to all of us—and it was Mary who delivered the package.

(Why the Nativity?, pages 16-17)

SB#153 – Thou didst leave thy throne and thy kingly crown	TB-94 – Margaret	HTD10 –T6 (4 vs.)
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HC#45 – While We are Waiting, Come	HC-45	HCD3-T15
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Congregational Prayers: [Select 2 people from the congregation to read the following prayers from their seats.]

Prayer #1:

Your plan of redemption was advanced when one simple peasant girl said yes to you—a yes that would change the world. There was no complicated ritual, nor advanced theological training involved. Just the trusting words, “I am the Lord’s servant. May it be to me as you have said.” Lord, may it be the same in my life. Help me to cooperate with your plan for the world by saying yes to you. Even now, I say yes to you, Holy Spirit. Come upon me so that the life of Christ may be manifested through me to the needy world around me. Amen.

(Praise & Worship Bible, page 1372)

Prayer #2:

Lord, the honor bestowed on Mary was staggering. So was the responsibility. To be the one not only to bear you but to protect you, raise you, teach you. I pray that even across so many centuries she could teach me too. There is so much I could learn from her. What wonderful things would be birthed in my life if only I could learn to pray, “I am your servant. May it be to me as you say.”

If that were my prayer, how would it affect the thoughts I think, the plans I make, the words that come from my mouth? If I read my Bible this morning with such a response, how different would this afternoon be? How different this afternoon would I be?

“I am your servant.” The words seem so religiously correct. But are they really true? Am I *really* your servant? Am I willing to submit to whatever plans you have for my life, regardless of the risk, the cost, the consequences?

For years she taught you, Lord, with so many words and in so many ways. It’s sad so few words have been saved for us. But thank you for saving the words, “I am your servant. May it be to me as you say.” If I learn nothing else from her, those words have given me a model not only of how to pray but how to live.

(Moments With the Savior, pages 27-28)

Message – Mary - He Changed My Story

HC#156 – Enter In	HC-156	HCD14-T15
Additional Optional Songs		
HC#130 – Lead Me, Lord	HC-130	HCD11-T20
HC#112 – The Potter’s Hand	HC-112	HCD10-T12

Benediction:

Lord Jesus, we come with praise and thanksgiving for the marvel and miracle of your birth we celebrate this season. Come once again to us this hour that we may rejoice because you have been born in our hearts. We pray that in all our labors, in all our relationships, in all of our life, you will live and love through us, in all our seasons of life, as our Savior and Lord. In your name, we pray.

(Colonel Henry Gariepy)

Vocal Benediction – HC#140 – O Come, All Ye Faithful SB#85 – O come, all ye faithful	HC-140 TB-552 – Adeste Fideles	HCD12-T20 HTD3-T1 (3 vs.)
Additional Optional Songs		
HC#61 – Crown Him King of Kings	HC-61	HCD5-T11
HC#141 – All Hail the Power	HC-141	HCD13-T11
HC#149 – In Christ Alone	HC-149	HCD13-T19
HC#151 – Fairest Lord Jesus	HC-151	HCD14-T11
SB#112 – It was on a starry night HC#180	TB-535 – same HC-280	HCD16-T20
HC#260 – Go, Tell it on the Mountain	HC-260	HCD24-T20

Week # 1	
DRAMA	
Good News/Bad News	
By Martyn Scott Thomas	
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Topic:	God's message
Scripture:	Luke 1:26-38
Synopsis:	An expectant teenager contemplates how to break the news to her family.
Characters:	Mary – the mother of Jesus (14-16).
Props/Costumes:	Biblical or modern dress.
Setting:	Bare stage.
Running Time:	3 minutes.

Mary: *[excited, but a bit nervous about what she has to share]* “I have good news and I have bad news.” When given that choice, which would you want to hear first? If you choose the good news, maybe you hope that it will be much better than the bad news. Maybe you just want to be happy before you're brought back to reality. If you choose the bad news first, perhaps you are hoping the good news to come will wash away the bad. Or maybe you just want to get the bad news done with. In the end, it really doesn't matter which you get first, you still need to hear both sides.

If you're the one sharing the news, which would you want to give first? Again, I don't think it really matters. It all depends on the perspective of the hearer.

That brings me to my news. To me, it's the most wonderful news ever. But to my family, and to my fiancé, it could be devastating, disgraceful and even potentially deadly.

It's the kind of news that signals a new beginning; the kind of news that changes lives. And I know that not everyone will be ready to hear what I have to say.

I'm having a baby. There, I said it. And it went pretty well – no screaming or crying or fainting. But in a little while, I'll have to say it again to those I care about most. And then, there will be screaming and crying and probably fainting. I just hope they can get past that so I can tell them the rest of the news. And I hope they'll believe what I have to say. I'm still having a hard time believing it myself.

You see, I'm engaged to be married, legally bound, but not yet physically bound. That's where the news may seem bad. Unmarried girls are not supposed to be pregnant. It's a sin, punishable by stoning.

It also brings disgrace to the groom-to-be and to the girl's family. They could even be forced to move to a new town and start life over again.

So what's the good news? Well, I haven't been unfaithful to my husband, Joseph. The child I'm carrying doesn't represent my sin, but represents freedom from all sin. My child is the long-promised Messiah. I will give birth to one who will be called the Son of the Most High.

How do I know all this? How is it possible? How can a virgin conceive? Those were my questions exactly; spoken to the angel of the Lord who brought this news to me.

"Don't be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God!" He went on, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God."

So I have the most wonderful news. It's the kind of news that signals a new beginning; the kind of news that changes lives. And I know that not everyone will be ready to hear what I have to say. I just hope that those closest to me are ready for the good news.

[*Blackout*]

JESUS CHANGED MY LIFE

Advent Sermon – Week 1

December 2, 2007

Mary—He Changed My Story

Text: Luke 1:26-38; 46-49

Premise: Aligning ourselves with God’s plan for us will transform the potential and the course of our lives.

There are certain events that change the courses of our lives – marriage, birth of a child, death of a loved one, and meeting that special someone, and if Monster.com is right: landing the perfect job. Throughout this Advent season, we will be looking at the impact the birth of Jesus had on the lives of various people from the Scripture narratives. Every believer’s celebration of the Advent season can be enriched by understanding that God relates to us today in a similar way as He did with the individuals in the biblical narratives.

At the beginning of the movie *Hook*, Robin Williams’ character, Peter is so busy with his business that he misses his daughter’s play and his son’s baseball game. It’s only as he slows down, relearns the joy of life and relationships, that he is able to change the sad story of his life, face his fears and defeat his old enemy, Capt. Hook. At times, the Christmas season in The Salvation Army can cause our lives to be just as hectic and consuming as Peter’s if we aren’t careful. It would be tragic if we allowed ourselves to become so busy with raising money and helping people that when we come to Christmas morning, we are not prepared to celebrate the birth of our Savior.

This Sunday marks the beginning of the Advent season. God gives us four weeks to prepare our hearts and lives to celebrate the gift of His Son, Jesus. Although many people like to take life just as it comes – day by day, the fact is, a time of preparation is a marvelous gift - and a necessity! Imagine not having nine months to prepare for the arrival of a baby. Imagine a football coach sending his team to play a championship game without practicing or reviewing game films. We need times of preparation in order to be ready for any significant undertaking in life.

Life often rushes by at such a pace that it’s quite possible to miss important events. People sometimes make comments like:

Where have the years gone?

How did you grow up so quickly?

It seems like it was only yesterday . . .

God uses times like the Advent season to help us slow down and catch our breath, to consider the direction our lives are going, to re-examine our focus. Taking time to slow down and reflect on what it means to be a person of faith can profoundly impact our relationships, our behaviors, our dreams, and ultimately the course of our lives.

I. Everyone has an idea of the direction of their life story (27,34)

“Once upon a time...” – there is something special about that phrase. A good story pulls us in, grabs our emotions, and causes our imaginations to wake up – to see new horizons and new potential.

- A. In our Scripture passage, we meet Mary. Although we know a lot about Mary, there is much we really don't know for sure. We do know:
 - a. Mary was a young woman (vs. 27)
 - b. She was unmarried, but engaged to a man named Joseph. (vs. 27)
 - c. Engagement in that time was a more formal and binding relationship than what we think of today.
 - d. She kept herself pure (vs. 34).

- B. As do so many young women and men, Mary probably had dreams, and her own idea of the direction her life story would take.
 - a. Mary probably had dreams of being married to Joseph
 - b. Of being a mother
 - c. Of serving her God as both an individual and member of God's chosen people. Mary's response to the angel's announcement was indicative that she was already someone sensitive to God's presence and leading in her life.

- C. We each have an idea of the plotline of our lives
 - a. The author J. M. Barrie once said, “The life of every man is a diary in which he means to write one story, and writes another. . .”
 - b. Think of how you used to respond to, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” at various stages in your life. What changed?
 - c. Proverbs 19:21: “Many are the **plans** in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails.” In aligning our plans with God's purposes, we will experience joy rather than frustration and bitterness.

II. When God enters our story, He reveals new paths and possibilities in our lives. (26, 28-33, 35-37)

- A. Then one day, Mary encountered an unexpected visitor – the angel Gabriel
 - a. This is the same angel who visited Zechariah.
 - b. “I stand in the presence of God” – Gabriel would have heard the Father's plans.
 - c. The angel calmed Mary's fears by pronouncing God's favor. “Highly favored” in Greek shares the same root word for grace and joy. As people who share in God's grace, we are favored and have reason for joy!

- B. Mary discovers God's plans as Gabriel elaborates on what “being favored” means for Mary
 - a. She will have a child - OK, that's part of her plan.
 - b. She will name him Jesus – this is still not earth-shattering. Jesus, a Greek form of Joshua (Yeshua) was a common name.
 - c. He will be great – doesn't every mother think that?

It is in the last three of Gabriel's pronouncements that Mary's world is rocked off its foundations.

- d. Her child, Jesus, will be called the Son of the Most High
- e. He will be king over Israel
- f. He will be king forever!

The angel was saying Mary's child was different than any other baby born – He is **the** eternal God! Now that is going to cause some drastic changes in Mary's life.

- C. Mary doesn't say: "Hold on, that's not how my life is supposed to be." What is Mary's response?
 - a. How can this be since I'm a virgin?
 - b. Her question isn't due to a lack of faith as in the case of Zechariah. Mary is simply asking, "Help me understand how what you are saying can happen. Doesn't producing a baby require a father?"
 - c. When God entered Mary's life, He revealed new paths and possibilities. Her life would not be as she planned or dreamed; in fact, it would never be the same again. The same can be said of us – encountering God will reveal new possibilities and our lives will never be the same again.
- D. Gabriel tells Mary the child will indeed have a father: the Heavenly Father.
 - a. This is not like the joining of gods and human described in Greek and Roman mythology. God himself in the person of the Holy Spirit will overshadow Mary. This overshadowing is possibly God's Shekinah glory covering Mary as it did the tabernacle in Exodus 40:38.
 - b. The miraculous birth was necessary because of Jesus' deity and preexistence.
- E. Gabriel, using Elizabeth as an illustration, reminds Mary that God is in the business of doing the impossible to accomplish His plans.
 - a. If a woman who has never been able to have a baby, and who is now well past the age for bearing children is able to have a child, then God can also certainly bring about the miraculous conception of which Gabriel has just told Mary about.
 - b. God is still in the business of doing the miraculous in the lives of His people today through:
 - i. Forgiving our sin
 - ii. Enabling us to live victoriously through His sanctifying power
 - iii. Bringing comfort and wholeness to broken lives
 - iv. Healing
 - v. Breaking the cycle of addiction
 - c. The Advent season is a perfect time to either remember and celebrate the day when God changed our life's story by graciously and miraculously entering our lives, or allowing Him to do so for the first time.

III. Cooperating with God in the rewriting of our life's story leads us to a life of blessedness and impact (38; 46-49)

- A. Mary decides to say yes to God's plan for her life. Mary had only one response to Gabriel's explanation: "I belong to the Lord, body and soul, let it happen as you say" (Luke 1:38, PH).
- B. Mary declares in her song of joy, known as The Magnificat, her realization that her life will be radically changed as a result of her decision. When God entered Mary's life, He revealed new paths and possibilities.
 - a. Her life would not be as she planned or dreamed; in fact, it would never be the same again.
 - b. "From now on, all generations will call me blessed" (Luke 1:48). Everyone acknowledges God's favor in Mary's life.
 - c. As a result of Mary's obedience, God's Son entered the world. That is a life of lasting impact.
- C. Admittedly, although Mary's role in God's plan of salvation was unique, in some ways, the same can be said of us. Encountering God will reveal new possibilities and our lives will never be the same again.
 - a. We will pass from death to life
 - b. We will experience God's grace and favor.
 - c. We too, will impact our world as we live as salt and light (Matt. 5:13-16).
 - d. We can love others with abandon as well allow God's love to live in us and flow from us.

Mary's life of blessedness and impact unfolded when she agreed to allow God to rewrite her life's story. The question you and I must resolve is: who will be the author of our story?

May each of us make a fresh commitment as we start this Advent season to allow God to be the author of our life's story. Open yourself to a life of blessedness and impact. It will not be without its problems, but it will be a "happy ending."

JESUS CHANGED MY LIFE
JOSEPH - He Directs My Actions
Advent Worship Series – Week 2
December 9, 2007

WORSHIP SERVICE OUTLINES

Each worship outline contains all elements needed for your worship service. The order of each service presented is only a *suggestion*. No doubt changes will be needed to accommodate the flow and worship style of your corps. The outlines are flexible and allow opportunities to “cut and paste” as needed. If you are blessed with instrumental or vocal music resources, you may find there is more structured material here than needed. It is recommended that the headings of each section of the service be included in the bulletin.

Announcements and Offering

Call to Worship:

The man of wood and stone had to become a man of dream and destiny. The man who had yearned for his own flesh and blood found his calling as an adoptive father.

Today, we know Joseph’s name because of his faithfulness and obedience in following every instruction that God gave him. In Joseph and in Mary, God selected the only man and the only woman in this world to whom he would entrust his own precious Son.

Joseph was a quiet man. When the wise men visited, for example, no word is recorded from Joseph. But he was a man of faith, dependability, and practicality who served as a model not only for the beloved Child but for all of us who would stand quietly in that Child’s presence.

(Why the Nativity?, page 28)

HC#151 – Fairest Lord Jesus	HC-151	HCD14-T11
Additional Optional Songs		
SB#100 – Angels, from the realms of glory	TB-398 – Come and Worship (Regent Sq.)	HTD4-T12 (4 vs.)
SB#113 – Joy to the world!	TB-87 – Joy to the World!	HTD4-T9 (3 vs.)
SB#114 – Light of the world	TB-653 – Here I am to Worship	
HC#146 – Here I am to Worship	HC-146	HCD13-T16
SB#116 – O come, all ye faithful	TB-496 – Adeste Fideles	HTD3 –T1 (3 vs.)
HC#140 – O Come, All Ye Faithful	HC-140	HCD12-T20

HC#141 – All Hail the Power	HC-141	HCD13 –T11
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Responsive Scripture/Candle Lighting:

Leader: Joseph was open to receiving God’s message and guidance for his life. But more than just receiving the message, Joseph was also willing to change his decisions and behavior as a result of his encounter with God.

Solo 1: Come, let us adore him.

Solo 2: Immanuel, God with us.

[Lighting of the second Advent candle.]

Solo 2: On this second Sunday of Advent as we light the second candle, we are called to open our hearts to the miracle of Christ's coming and to his plan for our lives.

Leader: As you and I are sensitively obedient to God’s leading in our lives, we too will be changed and receive comfort, direction, and a clear view of God’s perspective in our lives.

All: An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:20-21)

Leader: All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:

All: Out of the stump of David’s family will grow a shoot—yes, a new Branch bearing fruit from the old root. And the Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. (Isaiah 11:1-2)

Leader: In that day the heir to David’s throne will be a banner of salvation to all the world. The nations will rally to him, and the land where he lives will be a glorious place. (Isaiah 11:10)

All: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and they will call him Immanuel”, which means “God with us.” (Isaiah 7:14)

HC#61 – Crown Him King of Kings	HC-61	HCD5-T11
Additional Optional Songs		
HC#10 – The Light Has Come	HC-10	HCD1-T10
HC#72 – Emmanuel	HC-72	HCD6-T12

HC#82 – Jesus, Name Above All Names	HC-82	HCD7-T12
HC#123 – Shine on Us	HC-123	HCD11-T13
HC#146 – Here I am to Worship	HC-146	HCD13-T16
HC#169 – Hallelujah	HC-169	HCD15-T19
HC#187 – Jesus, Messiah	HC-187	HCD17-T17
HC#219 – King of Kings, Majesty	HC-219	HCD20-T19
HC#220 – Incarnate	HC-220	HCD20-T20

[NOTE: It is recommended that either the movie clip *OR* the drama be chosen for the service—*NOT BOTH*.]

Movie Clip



The Nativity Story – The Journey of a Lifetime, a Story for All Time
(Distributed by New Line Home Entertainment)

Scene 12

Start: 46:32 Mary at door
End: 49:35 “I am your husband...”

Optional Movie Clips

Close to Jesus – The Stories of Those He Touched

Disc 2 – Joseph of Nazareth

(Distributed by Artisan Home Entertainment)

Scene 6 – Conception

Start: 37:28 Joseph...”Mary, Mary...where’s Mary?”
End: 42:49 Joseph leaves

Start: 44:40 Joseph walking up hill, sits at table...”I’ll marry you...”

End: 48:28 “...If it’s true?”

Scene 7 – The Lord Saves

Start: 48:30 Joseph sleeping...“Mary, Mary...why?”
End: 51:18 Wedding.... “...around your table”

Jesus of Nazareth (Distributed by Artisan Home Entertainment)

Scene 9 – Joseph’s Dilemma

Start: 21:48 ... “That’s too much for any man to believe.”
End: 25:49 “...Thank you.”

Scene 10 – Nightmares

Start: 25:53 Joseph’s dream
End: 27:15 ...”the Savior...”

Start: 27:16 Wedding
End: 30:32 Wedding

Mary of Nazareth (Distributed by Questar, Inc.)

Scene 3

Start: 16:26 Joseph sleeping
End: 17:30 ...”from their sins”

Drama: A Well Ordered Life

Reading:

Why Joseph? To fulfill his plan, God needed a carpenter. He needed a man who was sturdy, stable, and practical, yet sensitive to the voice of God. He needed one who would stand quietly with a young virgin who might have seemed an object of ridicule, yet who carried in her womb the hope of the world. Joseph was strong but compassionate; he was able to lead the tiring expedition to Bethlehem and to the stable, to love and encourage the mother of Christ. Joseph, as the man of the house, was the teacher to give Jesus his first lessons in the law of God. And in Jerusalem, when the boy was twelve and it became evident that his first allegiance must be to another Father, Joseph was the man to humbly and silently step back and let God step forward.

(Why the Nativity?, page 29)

HC#82 – Jesus, Name Above All Names	HC-82	HCD7-T12
Additional Optional Songs		
HC#72 – Emmanuel	HC-72	HCD6-T12
HC#45 – While We are Waiting, Come	HC-45	HCD3-T15

Congregational Prayers: [Select 2 people from the congregation to read the following prayers from their seats.]

Prayer #1:

Who is this child? Who is this Wonderful Counselor? He is a man who has walked in our shoes, felt our pains and struggled with our temptations. Moreover, he walks with us now, every step of the way. How could we not love him? O Light of the World, prophesied deliverer of Israel, you have truly come. You are my deliverer and the light of my world as well. With joy I acknowledge your right to every righteous and holy title and to every place of authority. Come, Lord Jesus, Messiah, and rule over us with justice and peace. Do it even now in me. I welcome you gratefully to the throne of my life. Amen.

(The NIV Worship Bible, page 909)

Prayer #2

Eternal and most holy God, we praise and honor you as we gather in the name of your dear Son, Jesus. During this Advent season we sense your nearness in the songs we sing and in the words we hear from Holy Scripture.

May your light and peace radiate about us and within us as we worship you today. We praise and thank you for this house of worship and this body of your church. In expectation and joy, we worship you now and each day until Jesus returns to claim his own. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Message – Joseph—He Directs My Actions

HC#130 – Lead Me, Lord	HC-130	HCD11-T20
Additional Optional Songs		
HC#156 – Enter In	HC-156	HCD14-T15
HC#112 – The Potter’s Hand	HC-112	HCD10-T12
HC#219 – King of Kings, Majesty	HC-219	HCD20-T19
HC#220 – Incarnate	HC-220	HCD20-T20
HC#226 – I Worship You	HC-226	HCD21-T16

Benediction:

Lord Jesus, we come with praise and thanksgiving for the marvel and miracle of your birth we celebrate this season. Come once again to us this hour that we may rejoice because you have been born in our hearts. We pray that in all our labors, in all our relationships, in all of our life, you will live and love through us, in all our seasons of life, as our Savior and Lord. In your name, we pray.

(Colonel Henry Gariepy)

Vocal Benediction – HC#140 – O Come, All Ye Faithful	HC-140	HCD12-T20
SB#85 – O come, all ye faithful	TB-552 – Adeste Fideles	HTD3-T1 (3 vs.)
Additional Optional Songs		
HC#61 – Crown Him King of Kings	HC-61	HCD5-T11
HC#141 – All Hail the Power	HC-141	HCD13-T11
HC#149 – In Christ Alone	HC-149	HCD13-T19
HC#151 – Fairest Lord Jesus	HC-151	HCD14-T11
SB#112 – It was on a starry night	TB-535 – same	
HC#180	HC-280	HCD16-T20
HC#260 – Go, Tell it on the Mountain	HC-260	HCD24-T20

Week # 2	
DRAMA	
A Well Ordered Life	
By Martyn Scott Thomas	
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Topic:	God's plan
Scripture:	Matthew 1:18-25
Synopsis:	A disciplined and detailed man talks about doing things according to God's plan.
Characters:	Joseph – the father of Jesus.
Props/Costumes:	Biblical or modern dress.
Setting:	Bare stage.
Running Time:	3 minutes.

Joseph: Everything has its place. Leave nothing to chance. Life goes more smoothly when you have a plan. I'm a firm believer in that philosophy. But then I should be – I'm a carpenter.

My work, my livelihood, depends on a good plan. I must pay attention to every last detail or my work suffers. If I don't follow the plan, things don't fit together as they should. The table wobbles. The chair collapses. The yoke shatters. That sense of order carries over into every part of my life. Without a plan, it just doesn't fit together as it should.

So, as you can imagine, I planned very carefully for the months leading up to my wedding. This was to be, by far, the most important event in my life. I would leave nothing to chance. I paid extra attention to every detail. I wanted everything to be perfect.

I soon found out my wedding would be anything but perfect. I knew something was wrong when Mary met me at my shop. She never stopped by while I was working. The shop was no place for a woman. But she needed to talk and it couldn't wait. What she told me brought all of my careful plans to a crash. She was pregnant.

I knew the child wasn't mine and I couldn't believe that Mary would betray me like this. But I still loved her and couldn't bear to see her hurt further, so I came up with a plan. I intended to divorce her quietly to avoid any additional public disgrace.

But that wouldn't happen. Before I could carry out my plan, an angel of the Lord appeared to me in a dream. He told me, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

I was shocked. Everything Mary had said was true. It was time for a new plan. I would take her home to be my wife. We would set up our home. I would remodel the nursery. We would prepare for the birth of our son, God's son. It would be a glorious birth; our home surrounded with family and friends, full of celebration, laughter, and jubilation. We would then parade him to Jerusalem, to the Temple, where he would be heralded by the priests and the people. All of Israel would rejoice with the birth of this child.

Once again, the plan would change. On the road to Bethlehem, nine months pregnant, there was no room in the Inn. We were pushed into a stable, surrounded not by family, but by animals. Instead of our warm soft bed, my wife and child were resting in hay, covered with the blanket from our donkey. Instead of the priests in the Temple, shepherds from the fields came to marvel at our baby. This is not what I planned. But it is what God planned.

I have no idea what's next for us, but God does. I'm learning to put my plans aside and listen for God's direction. He's entrusted me with his son and I know his plan is best.

[Blackout]

JESUS CHANGED MY LIFE

Advent Sermon – Week 2

December 9, 2007

Joseph—He Directs My Actions

Text: Matthew 1:18-25

Premise: As we are sensitively obedient to God’s leading, we will receive comfort, direction and a larger perspective.

Have you ever played the children’s game, “Blind Man’s Bluff,” or been at a party with a piñata? Both games start out the same way. Someone, wearing a blindfold, is spun around and then released to find the goal – either another player or the piñata. The people call out directions for the blindfolded person to follow. How well the person does often depends upon how well they can hear the directions and follow them. Often there may be some mean people who make it harder by shouting out wrong directions.

There are times all of us need help to find the right path in life. Sometimes that help can come in the form of a parent, a mentor, a counselor, a teacher, or a friend. All those sources would be considered natural sources. However, we believe that supernatural—or beyond natural help—is also available, pointing the way we should go. Supernatural assistance can come through the counsel of a mature Christian friend, through reading God’s word, and through prayer. And then . . . there are times God decides to make His will and direction very clear through an overt communication of His will. Joseph was someone who certainly needed supernatural direction. His life was spinning out of control and he desperately needed help. God doesn’t leave Joseph to make his decision on his own. In the middle of his fitful sleep, God sent Joseph an angel to reveal the nature of the Child Mary was carrying.

As you and I are sensitively obedient to God’s leading in our lives, we too will be changed and receive comfort, direction, and a clear view of God’s perspective in our lives.

1. Following God’s plan will help us move past our fears

- A. It’s natural to be anxious and fearful when confronted by the unknown.
 - a. Psychologists speak of fear as emotional reactions to perceived danger or other threats to security.
 - i. There are many phobias including: arachnophobia (the fear of spiders); acrophobia (the fear of heights); and the most commonly reported phobia – glossophobia, or fear of public speaking. .
 - ii. A fear response can be very helpful when it is because we are confronting something dangerous. In that case, fear is a survival mechanism.
 - b. The Bible has quite a bit to say about fear as well. “Fear” is found 326 times and “afraid” another 206 times in the Bible.
 - i. Fear can mean having reverence, as when we say, “the fear of God” (Deut 10:20).

- ii. 1 John 4:18 speaks of fear in terms of punishment, such as being afraid of a parent, boss, or teacher because we have done something wrong.
 - iii. Anxiety is described by one source as: “an unpleasant emotion which includes fear, worry and apprehension.” Phil. 4:6 encourages us to “be anxious in nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”
 - c. Joseph’s reality went from a dream to a nightmare. He was afraid; unsure what to do
 - i. Joseph had just found out his fiancé Mary was pregnant – and he knew the baby wasn’t his. From his point of view, obviously Mary had been unfaithful and guilty of adultery.
 - ii. That sort of thing wasn’t acceptable in the community. The Law said Joseph should divorce Mary.
 - iii. The Bible describes Joseph as an honorable man, and rather than subjecting her to public humiliation, Joseph decides the best thing is to divorce Mary quietly.
- B. God then gives Joseph the tools to confront and move past his fears.
 - a. The angel, Gabriel appears to Joseph saying, “Don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife. She is pregnant by the Holy Spirit.” Isn’t it interesting that when angels show up the first thing they say is, “Don’t be afraid.”
 - i. John’s father Zacharias (Luke 1:13).
 - ii. As we saw last week, the angel said the same thing to Mary (Luke 1:30).
 - iii. The angel says the same to the shepherds at the announcement of Jesus’ birth (Luke 2:10).
 - iv. In imparting that information, God gave Joseph just what he needed at that moment; assurance of Mary’s faithfulness and purity.
 - b. Joseph’s willingness to adopt Jesus as his son placed him legally in the line of David. One commentator noted: “If Joseph had carried through his plans to “dismiss [Mary] quietly” (v. 19) when he discovered she was already pregnant, not only would Jesus have been illegitimate in the eyes of his culture, but, according to Matthew, he would have been without the validity of a Davidic heritage.”
 - c. The angel continues, asking Joseph to believe something even more miraculous — that this child is to be the long-awaited Messiah.
 - d. Our passage gives two names for Jesus. First, the angel commands Joseph to give a name to the baby: That name is “Jesus,” a Hellenized version of the Hebrew *Yeshua*, a shortened form of Joshua, which means “Yahweh saves.” Second, in the Scripture

citation from Isaiah, Matthew features the fact that God has come to earth — Immanuel. The name “Immanuel” doesn’t appear elsewhere in the gospel (v. 23).

- C. If we allow Him, God will provide us what we need to positively respond to our fears and move past them.
 - a. Perhaps God will give us an assurance of His love and presence (Matthew 28:20).
 - b. At times, God will remind us that even though it seems our life may be spinning out of control, He has a plan and is in control.

II. Following God’s plan will take us out of our comfort zones by leading us to a larger perspective.

- A. At times, being faithful to God’s leading will put God’s people at odds with public opinion
 - a. You can imagine that Joseph’s decision to take Mary as his wife was not readily understood around the town. Joseph was willing to put up with any discomfort his controversial decision would bring in order to follow God’s will.
 - b. William Booth faced a similar response at his decision to leave his ministry in the Methodist New Connection. Many thought he was crazy and throwing away a promising career in the ministry.
 - c. In Acts 4:19-20, Peter and John, while standing in front of the Sanhedrin (the ruling council) declared: “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard (about Jesus).”
 - d. It takes courage for us to stay on a path to which we believe God has directed us. Many in society would prefer if we wouldn’t make people uncomfortable by talking about sin, holiness and social justice. However, God encourages us to be courageous because of His continued presence (Joshua 1:9).
- B. When God’s people are faithful in following God’s leading, they are led to decisions, circumstances, and destinations never imagined.
 - a. Joseph woke up from his dream and knew exactly what he should do.
 - i. Joseph married Mary, adopted Jesus as his own son, and protected him. Later, when Herod’s paranoia threatened Jesus’ life, Joseph again followed the angel’s leading and took Mary and Jesus to Egypt until Herod died.
 - ii. It was remarkable that Joseph treated Jesus as a son, although he wasn’t his biological father. Joseph showed true unselfishness, and a willingness to put his pride aside as he followed the will of God.

- iii. Although Joseph married Mary, he didn't have sexual relations with her until after Jesus was born. That fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy, "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" -- which means, "God with us."
- b. William and Catherine Booth, in choosing to follow God's leading, left the security of a safe and respectable ministry and ultimately founded The Salvation Army.
- c. As you and I are faithful in following God's leading, we can find ourselves being marvelously used by God as the channels of blessing, grace, mercy and love to people who are hurting and alienated. When we do that we play an important role in carrying forward God's plan of salvation.

Joseph was open to receiving God's message and guidance for his life. But more than just receiving the message, Joseph was also willing to change his decisions and behavior as a result of his encounter with God. On this second Sunday of Advent, let us follow Joseph's example through our willingness to:

Receive and follow God's message of love and reconciliation.

Move out of our comfort zones to serve people who are hurting.

Take our places in fulfilling God's plan of salvation.

JESUS CHANGED MY LIFE
MAGI - He Is Now My Object of Worship
Advent Worship Series – Week 3
December 16, 2007

WORSHIP SERVICE OUTLINES
 Each worship outline contains all elements needed for your worship service. The order of each service presented is only a *suggestion*. No doubt changes will be needed to accommodate the flow and worship style of your corps. The outlines are flexible and allow opportunities to “cut and paste” as needed. If you are blessed with instrumental or vocal music resources, you may find there is more structured material here than needed. It is recommended that the headings of each section of the service be included in the bulletin.

Announcements and Offering

SB#100 – Angels, from the realms of glory	TB-398 – Come and Worship (Regent Sq.)	HTD4-T12 (4 vs.)
Additional Optional Songs		
SB#113 – Joy to the world!	TB-87 – Joy to the World!	HTD4-T9 (3 vs.)
SB#114 – Light of the world	TB-653 – Here I am to Worship	
HC#146 – Here I am to Worship	HC-146	HCD13-T16
SB#116 – O come, all ye faithful	TB-496 – Adeste Fideles	HTD3 –T1 (3 vs.)
HC#140 – O Come, All Ye Faithful	HC-140	HCD12-T20

Call to Worship:

Suppose you could give a gift to Christ, what would it be? How could you possibly select a gift for the One who not only has everything, but who made everything?

The Wise Men did. They can be an example to us. In addition to the gold, frankincense, and myrrh, they gave the Savior some gifts we can give him today: their hope, their time, and their worship.

The wandering wise men gave Jesus their hope. When everyone else saw a night sky, this small band of men saw the light. The sight of the star sparked a desire in their hearts that sent them packing. They went, seeking Jesus.

(One Incredible Moment, page 41)

SB#76 – As with gladness men of old	TB-306 - Dix	None
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Additional Optional Songs		
SB#92 – When wise men came seeking for Jesus from far	TB-567 – Normandy Carol	none

SB#101 – As with gladness men of old	TB-276 – Dix	HTD11-T3
Additional Optional Songs		
HC#146 – Here I am to Worship	HC-146	HCD13-T16
HC#219 – King of Kings, Majesty	HC-219	HCD20-T19
HC#220 – Incarnate	HC-220	HCD20-T20
HC#226 – I Worship You	HC-226	HCD21-T16
SB#129 – We three kings of Orient are:	TB-915 – same	HTD10-T12 (3 vs.)
SB#130 – When Christ drew near to dwell with men	TB-4 – Armadale	No CD
SB#131 – When wise men came seeking for Jesus from far,	TB-507 – Normandy Carol	HTD11-T6 (3 vs.)
	TB-497 – Away in a Manger	HTD6-T3 (3 vs.)

Responsive Scripture/Candle Lighting:

Leader: When night comes to your world, what do you see? The darkness or the stars? Hopelessness or hopefulness? Sometimes, just as he did so long ago, God uses the darkness to reveal his stars—“The light shines in the darkness” (John 1:5). If your heart has been shadowed by the darkness of loneliness or grief or disappointment, look for the light that only he can give. “I am the light of the world. The person who follows me will never live in darkness but will have the light that gives life” (John 8:12).

Solo 1: Come, let us adore him.

Solo 2: Immanuel, God with us.

[Lighting of the third Advent candle.]

Solo 2: As we light the third candle, we are called to open our hearts to the miracle of Christ's coming and to his plan for our lives.

Solo 1: Give God your time. The wise men did. Before they gave God their gifts, they gave their *presence*. It's likely that these men traveled as long as two years before locating the prince of heaven. Before that one incredible moment when they knelt before Jesus, the wise men spent many moments, months, perhaps years searching, in anticipation of that meeting. Just as the wise men devoted themselves to seeking the Savior, so can you:

Solo 2: “You will seek him and find him when you seek him with all of your heart” (Deuteronomy 4:29).

[NOTE: It is recommended that either the movie clip *OR* the drama be chosen for the service—*NOT BOTH*.]

Movie Clip



The Nativity Story – The Journey of a Lifetime, a Story for All Time
(Distributed by New Line Home Entertainment)

Scene 20

Start: 1:25:28 Wise men traveling

End: 1:28:56 Nativity scene

Optional Movie Clips

Close to Jesus – The Stories of Those He Touched

Disc 2 – Joseph of Nazareth

(Distributed by Artisan Home Entertainment)

Scene 11

Start: 1:05:34 “Where is the king of the Jews?”

End: 1:09:00 “...prince, priest, prophet”

Jesus of Nazareth (Distributed by Artisan Home Entertainment)

Scene 21

Start: 59:14 Mary & Joseph walk down hill

End: 1:02:01 Mary

Mary of Nazareth (Distributed by Questar, Inc.)

Scene 6

Start: 26:45 Kings enter to visit Herod

End: 29:31 Kings leaving Bethlehem

Drama: Fit for a King

Reading:

Men of wealth, influence, and intellect: what did they do when they saw Jesus?
“...They fell down and *worshipped* him” (Matthew 2:11).

Worship. It’s a gift that extends to the giver as well. Through worship we come to see God more clearly. God invites us, through worship, to see his face so he can change ours. “We all show the Lord’s glory, and we are being changed to be like him. This change in us brings ever greater glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

He loves to change the faces of his children. By his fingers, wrinkles of worry are rubbed away. Shadows of shame and doubt become portraits of grace and trust. He relaxes clenched jaws and smoothes furrowed brows.

The wise men sought the child of God, just as God seeks his children. “The Father is actively seeking such people to worship him” (John 4:23).

The gifts of hope, time, and worship. Three gifts the wise will give.

(One Incredible Moment, pages 42-44)

HC#136 – We All Bow Down	HC-136	HCD12-T16
Additional Optional Songs		
SB#153 – Thou didst leave thy throne and thy kingly crown	TB-94 – Margaret	HTD10 –T6 (4 vs.)
HC#146 – Here I am to Worship	HC-146	HCD13-T16
HC#169 – Hallelujah	HC-169	HCD15-T19
HC#219 – King of Kings, Majesty	HC-219	HCD20-T19
HC#220 – Incarnate	HC-220	HCD20-T20
HC#226 – I Worship You	HC-226	HCD21-T16
HC#168 – Offering (Words below)	HC-168	HCD15-T18
<p>"Christmas Offering" (Christmas words)</p> <p>Over the skies of Bethlehem appeared a star While angels sang to lowly shepherds Three wisemen seeking truth, they traveled from afar Hoping to find the Child from Heaven falling on their knees They bow before the humble Prince of peace</p> <p>We bring an offering of worship to our King No one on earth deserves the praises that we sing Jesus, may You receive the honor that You're due O Lord, I bring an offering to You</p> <p>Continue song with original words</p>		

Congregational Prayer: [Select someone from the congregation to read the following prayer from their seat.]

Thankfully, Lord, there are times when my heart seeks you as the wise men did...when I am diligent in searching for you...when I am delighted at any sign pointing the way...when I am down on my knees in your presence. Multiply those times in my life, Lord.

Thank you for the stars and the dreams and the Scriptures and the many ways you reveal yourself. Give me eyes to see you in the circumstances of my life, ears to hear you in the

Scriptures, feet to find you in the Bethlehems of this world, hands to bring you my gifts, knees to bow before you, and a heart overflowing with worship.

(Moments With the Savior, page 46)

Message – Magi—He is Now My Object of Worship

O Come Let Us Adore Him		No CD
Additional Optional Songs		
SB#104 – Who is he in yonder stall	TB-319 – Who is he?	HTD10-T19 (6 vs.)
SB#118 – O little town of Bethlehem	TB-136 – same	HTD3-T5 (3 vs.) Bethlehem
HC#120 – In the Manger	HC-120	HCD10-T20
HC#123 – Shine on Us	HC-123	HCD11-T13
HC#136 – We All Bow Down	HC-136	HCD12-T16
HC#146 – Here I am to Worship	HC-146	HCD13-T16
HC#219 – King of Kings, Majesty	HC-219	HCD20-T19
HC#220 – Incarnate	HC-220	HCD20-T20
HC#226 – I Worship You	HC-226	HCD21-T16

Benediction:

Lord Jesus, we come with praise and thanksgiving for the marvel and miracle of your birth we celebrate this season. Come once again to us this hour that we may rejoice because you have been born in our hearts. We pray that in all our labors, in all our relationships, in all of our life, you will live and love through us, in all our seasons of life, as our Savior and Lord. In your name, we pray.

(Colonel Henry Gariepy)

Vocal Benediction – HC#140 – O Come, All Ye Faithful	HC-140	HCD12-T20
SB#85 – O come, all ye faithful	TB-552 – Adeste Fideles	HTD3-T1 (3 vs.)
Additional Optional Songs		
HC#61 – Crown Him King of Kings	HC-61	HCD5-T11
HC#141 – All Hail the Power	HC-141	HCD13-T11
HC#149 – In Christ Alone	HC-149	HCD13-T19
HC#151 – Fairest Lord Jesus	HC-151	HCD14-T11
SB#112 – It was on a starry night	TB-535 – same	
HC#180	HC-280	HCD16-T20
HC#260 – Go, Tell it on the Mountain	HC-260	HCD24-T20

Week # 3	
DRAMA	
Fit for a King	
By Martyn Scott Thomas	
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Topic:	Worship
Scripture:	Matthew 2:1-12
Synopsis:	A wise man reflects on giving the perfect gift.
Characters:	Caspar – a Magi from the East.
Props/Costumes:	Biblical or modern dress.
Setting:	Bare stage.
Running Time:	3 minutes.

Caspar: For some people, giving a gift can be an agonizing experience. First, they have to find just the right gift to give. They will check all the stores and all the sales, look at countless items trying to determine if it's the right size and the right color, and eventually come home empty-handed.

Others will rush out and buy the first thing they can find, make sure they get a gift receipt, wrap it quickly and be done with it. Some just buy gift cards.

I like to take a more scientific approach. I like to carefully consider to whom the gift will be given. I want to find out as much as I can about the person; what they like, what they have, what they need. I want to make sure it will be a gift used and remembered. It must be significant and appropriate for the recipient and the occasion.

Such an occasion presented itself when my friends and I first saw the star in the sky. We immediately began researching its meaning, investigating what exactly it marked. We soon found out that it pointed to the birth of a Jewish king and we prepared to go and pay honor.

Before we left, we did some more research. We studied the Jewish holy writings to find out all we could about this king. We read the prophecies concerning him and let them guide our choice of gifts. We also wanted to give to him something representative of our lands.

Melchior decided on gold, a gift for a king, and abundant in his land. I settled on frankincense, a perfume used in worship, and worthy of a priest. Balthasar brought the most intriguing gift, myrrh, a spice used for burial. After reading the prophecies concerning this king, he felt that it would have future significance.

So, we set off on our journey, traveling across the wilderness, guided by his star. Months went by and we finally reached Jerusalem. As was

custom, we stopped at the palace to inquire of King Herod the whereabouts of the child king. He seemed unaware and immediately called the Jewish religious leaders to find out what their scriptures said about him. We were then sent to Bethlehem with instructions to report back to Herod all that we found.

Upon our arrival, we found the family and the boy. We presented our carefully selected gifts to him; gold, frankincense and myrrh. But, then we offered something else; something significant and appropriate for the recipient and the occasion. We bowed down and we offered our worship. For this child was meant not only to be an earthly king, but a heavenly one as well.

The best gifts are always those that are given from the heart and with great meaning. I don't think we could have given Jesus anything better than our adoration and praise. It seems that's what he needed most.

[Blackout]

JESUS CHANGED MY LIFE

Advent Sermon – Week 3

December 16, 2007

Magi—He Is Now My Object of Worship

Text: Matthew 2:1-12

On this third Sunday in Advent, we are going to focus on the Wise men. Sometimes they are also known as the three kings, or the Magi. These travelers from the east, who play such an important role in the Matthew's Nativity narrative, have also been the subjects of Christmas carols, movies, and even operas. Most likely, the Magi were on their journey for quite some time. Some commentators speculate the Magi visit may have taken place up to two years after the birth of Jesus. That means the Magi were most likely not at the manger scene we often see during the Advent season.

Over the years, there has been a great amount of speculation about the Magi. Precisely from where in the east did the Magi begin their journey? How many Magi were there? Recently I came across another interesting bit of speculation: "Do you know what would have happened if there had been three wise WOMEN instead of three wise MEN? The three wise WOMEN would have asked for directions, arrived on time, helped deliver the Baby, cleaned the stable, made a casserole, and given practical gifts".

Although I don't necessarily agree with all of the conclusions of that observation (after all, didn't they ask for directions (vs.2)?), the visit of the Magi does show that this child, this Jesus we worship is special, and the fulfillment of prophesy. Included in the first covenant God makes with Abraham, is the promise "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:3). Jesus is more than just the Jewish Messiah, He is destined to be the blessing for everyone on Earth. When the Magi came and worshiped, they were the first of millions of gentiles granted God's favor because of the gift of His Son.

There are several lessons we can learn from the Magi. However, this morning, we are going to look at three specific lessons. If we adopt similar behaviors and attitudes, we too will experience God's grace in the person of Jesus, we will worship and we will be changed.

I. Lesson 1 – Clear Focus is the Foundation of True Worship.

- A. The Magi knew and kept moving toward their object of worship.
 - i. The Magi knew what they were seeking – "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him" (Matt 2:2).
 - ii. They followed a star, which meant they were traveling by night. Many have speculated as to whether the star the Magi followed was actually a conjunction of planets, a supernova, or a comet. Others believe the star in Matthew's gospel is precisely what he says - a supernatural object God places in the sky for just that occasion. Whatever it was, it was pretty amazing because it led the Magi on their journey.

- iii. The Magi were excellent examples of the truth Jesus spoke of in Matthew 7:7 according to the Amplified Bible: “keep on seeking and you will find”.
- B. The Magi did not allow obstacles to distract them from their goal.
- i. The star got the Magi close to their goal. However, when they arrived at Jerusalem, they started asking about the child. What happened to the star? Did it get cloudy, or perhaps the star had stopped or had even disappeared. In the face of an obstacle, the Magi had a decision to make.
 - ii. Their decision was actually the same as ours today whenever we face an obstacle. Do we allow the obstacles and challenges we face in life to distract us, or do we stay focused on our goal of worshiping and serving God?
 - iii. Have you ever noticed how easy it is to become distracted during worship? Any number of things can pull us away from the very reason we come together: to worship Christ the Lord.
 - iv. The Magi had change their strategy to keep their search alive. They decided to ask for help in finding the child. They asked in the most logical place – Jerusalem. Jerusalem just a few miles from Bethlehem was the heart of the Jewish religious, political and cultural life. Why wouldn’t the child who was born King of the Jews be found there?
 - v. It is interesting that the pagan Magi had caught the significance of Jesus’ birth, but the Jewish religious experts missed it. The fourth verse says, “When he (Herod) had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the **Christ** was to be born.” Instead of joining the Magi in their search for the Messiah in Bethlehem, the chief priests and teachers of the law were content to act as Herod’s first century version of Google. They missed the blessing God had been telling them to expect for hundreds of years.
- C. God blesses the Magi’s faithfulness
- i. Learning about Bethlehem, the Magi leave Herod to find the child. As they leave Herod’s palace, the star reappears and leads them to Bethlehem. The star’s reappearing must have been a confirmation to the Magi. Their response? It was great joy.
 - ii. The Magi make their way from Jerusalem to Bethlehem and locate the house where Jesus and His parents are living. Actually, it probably wasn’t that hard to find Mary, Joseph and Jesus in Bethlehem. Luke says the shepherds were not shy about telling others their story (Luke 2:17).

Having found the king, the Magi moved on the next aspect of their goal. They wanted to not only **find** the child who had been born

King of the Jews, they then wanted to **worship** Him. That leads us to the next lesson we can learn from the Magi . . .

II. Lesson 2 – Preparation Precedes True Worship.

- A. Preparation – The motto of the Boy Scouts is: “Be Prepared.” The Magi were prepared to worship. The Magi had the gifts ready. They didn’t wait to see if they could find them in Bethlehem.
- B. Worship – Lately, when someone says worship most people think two ways: a religious service, or singing a bunch of praise choruses. But, what is worship?
- i. Worship is directed to a person or object. Of the four definitions Webster’s Dictionary offers, two are particularly helpful. The first is: “the reverence offered a supernatural being.” The other is: “extravagant respect or admiration for an object of esteem”.
 - ii. The original Greek word for worship means “to kiss towards.” The imagery here is of bowing to the ground and literally kissing the ground upon which the object of worship is standing. That posture is acknowledging that the object of worship is greater than us – that it is worthy of our respect or reverence.
 - iii. Worship is participatory. Teacher and author, Robert Weber wrote a book several years ago reminding us that “Worship is a Verb.” The main idea is: worship is **not** a spectator sport. All of us who gather on a Sunday morning are participants and God is the object, the focus of everything that is said or done.
 - iv. Worship can also be an attitude. We can approach life with an attitude of reverence and in constant awareness of God’s love, presence, and provision. When we have that attitude, worship is a natural outflow.
- C. Present Gifts – The Magi presented their gifts to Jesus. They expected to meet this King and they were prepared with the proper gifts. The gifts were not only signs of respect, they also said something about their attitude and something about the sort of king they expecting to find.
- i. Gold – the gift for kings
 - ii. Frankincense – the gift for Deity
 - iii. Myrrh – the gift for one destined to be a redeeming sacrifice for the world.
- D. What attitude, what gifts do we bring?

III. Lesson 3 – Our Priorities and Behavior will change as a result of True Worship.

- A. After worshipping, the Magi received direction not to return to Herod.

- i. The Magi realized this Jesus, this King they had just seen and worshipped was more important than Herod who was in the palace. These are stark, contrasting pictures of grasped and real power.
- ii. Herod, who was not even a Jew, but an Idumean, had taken power which he regularly used and abused for his own selfish purposes. He had forgotten that earthly power is a gift from God (John 19:11). Herod had also forgotten that the true role of a king is to be a servant of the people, and that a leader's power comes from those who follow.
- iii. Jesus, on the other hand, was King because that was His place as the only begotten Son of the Heavenly Father. He was in a house, not a palace, but the Magi recognized, here was One who had true authority and power.

B. When we sincerely approach our Holy God in worship, we too, will be changed.

- i. We will see where our priorities need to be rearranged because we now know who is God – not us, but Him.
- ii. In the same way as Isaiah experienced in the 6th chapter, we will realize the extent of our sinfulness and our need for cleansing (vs 5-7). We will then be in a position to hear and respond to God's voice and direction (vs. 8-9).
- iii. Like the Magi, is there a new direction God needs to send you? Without spending time with Him, you will not be in a position to hear.

As we continue our preparation on this third Sunday in Advent, let's pause, worship, and listen for God's voice. That voice may tell us we've allowed our focus to wander, or become obstructed. This season is a great time to refocus on Jesus, the One who is worthy of our worship. That voice may reveal to us that we've allowed our lives to be so busy, that we miss great blessings because neglect to prepare our hearts to worship. This morning, having come into His presence and worshipped together, what is God revealing you need to change?

JESUS CHANGED MY LIFE
SHEPHERDS - Telling His Story Is Now My Business
Advent Worship Series – Week 4
December 23, 2007

WORSHIP SERVICE OUTLINES
 Each worship outline contains all elements needed for your worship service. The order of each service presented is only a *suggestion*. No doubt changes will be needed to accommodate the flow and worship style of your corps. The outlines are flexible and allow opportunities to “cut and paste” as needed. If you are blessed with instrumental or vocal music resources, you may find there is more structured material here than needed. It is recommended that the headings of each section of the service be included in the bulletin.

Announcements and Offering

SB#108 – Hark! The herald angels sing	TB-270 – Hark! The Herald Angels Sing	HTD4-T5 (3 vs.)
Additional Optional Songs		
SB#100 – Angels, from the realms of glory	TB-398 – Come and Worship (Regent Sq.)	HTD4-T12 (4 vs.)
SB#112 – It was on a starry night HC#180	TB-535 – same HC-280	HCD16-T20
SB#113 – Joy to the world!	TB-87 – Joy to the World!	HTD4-T9 (3 vs.)
SB#114 – Light of the world HC#146 – Here I am to Worship	TB-653 – Here I am to Worship HC-146	HCD13-T16
SB#105 – Do you know the song that the angels sang	TB-627 – Glory in the Highest	No CD
SB#125 – The angel Gabriel from Heaven came,	TB-624 – Gabriel’s Message	No CD
SB#126 – The first noel the angel did say	TB-857 – The First Noel	HTD6-T18 (3 vs.)
CF#17 – Angels we have heard on high	CF-17	No CD

Call to Worship:

“Blessed are the meek,” Jesus explained. Blessed are the available. Blessed are the conduits, the tunnels, the tools. . . .

That’s why the announcement went first to the shepherds. They didn’t ask God if he was

sure he knew what he was doing. Had the angel gone to theologians, they would have first consulted their commentaries. Had he gone to the elite, they would have looked around to see if anyone was watching. Had he gone to the successful, they would have first looked at their calendars.

So he went to the shepherds. Men who didn't have a reputation to protect or an ax to grind or a ladder to climb. Men who didn't know enough to tell God that angels don't sing to sheep and that messiahs aren't found wrapped in rags and sleeping in a feed trough.

(One Incredible Moment, page 31)

SB#118 – O little town of Bethlehem	TB-136 – same	HTD3-T5 (3 vs.) Bethlehem
Additional Optional Songs		
HC#220 – Incarnate	HC-220	HCD20-T20
SB#111 – It came upon the midnight clear	TB-133 – same	HTD9-T7
SB#132 – While shepherds watched their flocks by night	TB-125 – Winchester Old TB-123 – same	HTD11- 15 (4 vs.)

Responsive Scripture/Candle Lighting:

Leader: How prestigious was a local shepherd at the time of Jesus' birth? Shepherding was one of those occupations that everyone needed and no one desired. Hebrews in particular prized cleanliness and purity. Life among sheep lent itself to tired feet, long work shifts, and unwanted aromas.

Who were the first human visitors? They bore names nowhere recorded in the Bible. Yet whatever their names may have been, they graced the guest list for the most joyful moment human history had yet contained.

Solo 1: Come, let us adore him.

Solo 2: Immanuel, God with us.

Leader: Imagine the wonder of that evening for those humble field hands. One moment the skies were dark, and their moods were perhaps darker. The next moment angels were in their presence—angels with amazing news. Surely the shepherds shared our questions: “Why here? Why us?” And they were afraid.

[Lighting of the fourth Advent candle.]

Solo 2: As we light the fourth candle, we are called to open our hearts to the

miracle of Christ's coming and to his plan for our lives.

Leader: But these simple men followed the simple instructions the angels had given them. They made their way to Bethlehem and took part in an experience that countless generations of Christians have envied. As they left, they told everyone in their path of the things that had happened to them. Their lives would never again be the same; the sky would never seem so dark. They would know that just as they kept watch over their sheep by night, Someone far greater was keeping watch over them.

Solo 1: And perhaps as they grew old, their minds returned to that remarkable picture of the skies opening up. As soon as the first angel had delivered his message, “a vast host of others—the armies of heaven” (Luke 2:13) appeared, all of them praising God:

All: “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased” (Luke 2:14).

Solo 2: These words would not be forgotten—not as long as the shepherds had life and breath. Angels could appear to them. And there would be peace on earth “to those with whom God is pleased.”

Leader: And who would have thought that God might favor a shepherd? (*Why the Nativity*, pages 79-81, 82-83)

[NOTE: It is recommended that either the movie clip *OR* the drama be chosen for the service—*NOT BOTH*.]

Movie Clip



The Nativity Story – The Journey of a Lifetime, a Story for All Time
(Distributed by New Line Home Entertainment)

Scene 19 into 20

Start: 1:19:50 Crying...birth of Jesus

End: 1:25:28 Mary looks at baby

Optional Movie Clips

Close to Jesus – The Stories of Those He Touched

Disc 2 – Joseph of Nazareth

(Distributed by Artisan Home Entertainment)

Scene 10

Start: 1:02:13 Star

End: 1:05:34 “They’re here for him...”

Jesus of Nazareth (Distributed by Artisan Home Entertainment)

Scene 18

Start: 49:41 Bethlehem

End: 52:12 Star

Drama: One More Time

SB#113 – Joy to the world!	TB-87 – Joy to the World!	HTD4-T9 (3 vs.)
Additional Optional Songs		
SB#100 – Angels, from the realms of glory	TB-398 – Come and Worship (Regent Sq.)	HTD4-T12 (4 vs.)
SB#112 – It was on a starry night HC#180	TB-535 – same HC-280	HCD16-T20
SB#108 – Hark! The herald angels sing	TB-270 – Hark! The Herald Angels Sing	HTD4-T5 (3 vs.)
SB#126 – The first noel the angel did say	TB-857 – The First Noel	HTD6-T18 (3 vs.)
CF#17 – Angels we have heard on high	CF-17	No CD

HC#169 – Hallelujah	HC-169	HCD15-T19
Additional Optional Songs		
HC#123 – Shine on Us	HC-123	HCD11-T13

Congregational Prayer: [Select a person from the congregation to read the following prayer from their seat.]

Dear Savior, I thank you that you are *my* Savior and *my* Lord. Thank you for coming. And for placing yourself at our mercy. Take me to the stable to learn from you. To the manger. To the cloths. To a quiet place in the straw. There I pray you would give me the right eyes and ears that I may see you wherever you might come, hear you however you might speak.

Take me to the fields to learn from the shepherds. Give me the lowly heart of those shepherds, who, because of their humility, were entrusted with such great revelation. Give me their listening heart, which with fear and trembling hung on to every word that fell from heaven. Give me their searching heart, which left their work to scour the barns of Bethlehem to find you.

It is no wonder the announcement of your birth came to them—the lowly, the listening, the searching. And it is no wonder they were chosen to be the first evangelists.

Please grant me the grace, fairest Lord Jesus, that someday I might experience a spilling of heaven's glory on the fields over which I watch. Grant me an echo of some angelic song amid the monotonous of my day-to-day work. And grant me a heart to behold heavenly things in the humblest of places...Amen.

(Moments With the Savior, page 37-38)

Message – Shepherds—Telling His Story Is Now My Business

HC#120 – In the Manger	HC-120	HCD10-T20
Additional Optional Songs		
SB#153 – Thou didst leave thy throne and thy kingly crown	TB-94 – Margaret	HTD10 –T6 (4 vs.)
HC#169 – Hallelujah	HC-169	HCD15-T19
HC#219 – King of Kings, Majesty	HC-219	HCD20-T19
HC#220 – Incarnate	HC-220	HCD20-T20
HC#260 – Go, Tell it on the Mountain	HC-260	HCD24-T20

Benediction:

Lord Jesus, we come with praise and thanksgiving for the marvel and miracle of your birth we celebrate this season. Come once again to us this hour that we may rejoice because you have been born in our hearts. We pray that in all our labors, in all our relationships, in all of our life, you will live and love through us, in all our seasons of life, as our Savior and Lord. In your name, we pray.

(Colonel Henry Garipey)

Vocal Benediction – HC#140 – O Come, All Ye Faithful	HC-140	HCD12-T20
SB#85 – O come, all ye faithful	TB-552 – Adeste Fideles	HTD3-T1 (3 vs.)
Additional Optional Songs		
HC#61 – Crown Him King of Kings	HC-61	HCD5-T11
HC#141 – All Hail the Power	HC-141	HCD13-T11
HC#149 – In Christ Alone	HC-149	HCD13-T19
HC#151 – Fairest Lord Jesus	HC-151	HCD14-T11
SB#112 – It was on a starry night	TB-535 – same	
HC#180	HC-280	HCD16-T20
HC#260 – Go, Tell it on the Mountain	HC-260	HCD24-T20

Week # 4	
DRAMA	
One More Time	
By Martyn Scott Thomas	
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Topic:	God's message
Scripture:	Luke 2:8-24
Synopsis:	Two shepherds reflect on the previous night's activity.
Characters:	Jed – a shepherd outside of Bethlehem. Willie – his friend and fellow shepherd.
Props/Costumes:	Biblical or modern dress.
Setting:	Bare stage.
Running Time:	4 minutes.

[Willie is standing center stage, looking up to the sky]

- Jed:** *[enters, walks up to Willie]* Willie, what are you doing?
- Willie:** Just looking.
- Jed:** Well, you're supposed to be looking at the sheep, not the sky.
- Willie:** I know, but they're mostly asleep.
- Jed:** Mostly is not good enough. You know Caleb will be very angry if any of his sheep wander off; especially if it's because of us.
- Willie:** They're not going anywhere.
- Jed:** How do you know?
- Willie:** They didn't go anywhere last night.
- Jed:** That was last night.
- Willie:** I know. Amazing, wasn't it?
- Jed:** Amazing that none of the sheep wandered off while we ran into town? Absolutely, but I don't think we can be so lucky two nights in a row.
- Willie:** I meant the angels.
- Jed:** Oh yeah, I don't think we'll ever be that lucky again.
- Willie:** It was pretty cool though.

Jed: I guess, but weren't you scared at all?

Willie: Uh, yeah. Didn't you hear me scream?

Jed: I thought that was the sheep.

Willie: Sheep go, [*imitating a sheep*] "Baa!" I was screaming, [*screaming very loudly, sounding scared*] "Aaaaaah!"

Jed: I hear the difference.

Willie: But it was definitely worth it. I've never seen anything like that before.

Jed: Or heard anything like it. I thought my Aunt Miriam could sing, but those angels were heavenly.

Willie: [*gives an unbelieving look to Jed*]

Jed: And what about that baby?

Willie: Lying in a manger, just like the angels said.

Jed: So, why do you think more people didn't show up?

Willie: What do you mean?

Jed: I mean, why didn't more people come to the stable?

Willie: I don't know.

Jed: And after we told them all what we saw, why didn't anybody else go to see the baby?

Willie: Maybe they didn't believe us.

Jed: Why not?

Willie: Well, look at us. We're just shepherds.

Jed: So.

Willie: We live in the fields.

Jed: So.

Willie: And we smell like sheep.

Jed: So.

Willie: Maybe if they had seen the angels, too.

Jed: Yeah, maybe that's what it was. They were waiting for the angels.

Willie: I'm sure they'd all believe then.

Jed: Maybe they'll come back.

Willie: Maybe.

Jed: Hey, wait. Is that what you were looking for?

Willie: Maybe.

Jed: So you think that if they come back, we'll be able to get some people to come out and hear their message?

Willie: I don't know. I was just hoping they'd come back for us.

Jed: Just for us?

Willie: Well, yeah.

Jed: Why would you want them to come back just for us.

Willie: I just wanted to thank them.

Jed: Thank them for what?

Willie: Thank them for making sure we didn't miss the baby.

Jed: That's a great idea. Do you mind if I look for them with you?

Willie: But, what about the sheep?

Jed: They didn't go anywhere last night. [*looks up at the sky*]

Willie: That's what I thought. [*looks up at the sky*]

[*Blackout*]

JESUS CHANGED MY LIFE

Advent Sermon – Week 4

December 23, 2007

Shepherds—Telling His Story Is Now My Business

Text: Luke 2:8-20

Do you remember “Mission Impossible”? Depending on your age, you know the head of the team as either, Mr. Phelps or Mr. Hunt. Either way, the premise was the same: the members of the team would do whatever necessary, risk any danger or hostile circumstance, to fulfill their mission.

Well, Christmas is now only two days away. The rush is just about over, and our time of preparation is almost complete. Today, we are looking at the central and perhaps one of the most familiar parts of the Christmas narrative: where some shepherds hear the great news of the birth of the Messiah, Jesus. Those simple shepherds found themselves drafted, not to an impossible, but an **incredible** mission. They were witnesses to one of the pivotal steps in God’s plan of salvation for all of humanity. True, it wasn’t an exploding tape recorder that gave the shepherds their mission: it was a large number of angels singing their mission in the sky above a hillside outside of Bethlehem. They may have started out that night as just shepherds, but because of their experiences by the next morning, they had a new role to play: they became broadcasters—telling everyone about the messengers and the manger.

This morning, as we look once again at this familiar the story of the shepherds, it is my prayer that we will all once again experience the wondrous miracle of that night. And like the shepherds, realize we, too, have an obligation to share God’s great story with the world.

I. Receiving the Mission

A. The setting.

- a. Shepherds, working class, working the night shift. This seems an unlikely group of people for God to announce the birth of His Son.
- b. God has often chosen to use regular people: David was selected as king. Twelve very normal men were chosen to become Jesus’ disciples. William and Catherine Booth, in following God’s leading for their lives, founded The Salvation Army.
- c. The shepherds were taking care of business. They were watching (protecting) their sheep. As we are faithful, we place ourselves in a position to be useful to God.

B. The Messenger—an Angel, “one with a message” appears. Angels in Scripture are always present to do God's will, and spread His message in conjunction with man's salvation

- a. In the wilderness, angels ministered to Jesus after temptation (Matt

- 4:11).
 - b. In garden of Gethsemane, angel ministered to Jesus as He prayed (Luke 22:43).
 - c. An angel rolled away the stone from the tomb (Matt. 28:2).
 - d. Angels announced Christ's return (Acts 1:10-11).
- C. Luke goes on to say, "The glory of the Lord shown around them and they were afraid." Another translation says: "terrified." I can imagine how their terror was transformed to joy when they heard the angel's good news, emphasized by the backup choir. In doing so, the shepherds received their mission.
- a. Today in David's town, a **Savior** has been born to **you**—"A Savior"—to redeem us from our sins (Matt. 1:21).
 - b. "Christ"—the anointed one, the Messiah who had been promised (Is. 7:14).
 - c. "Lord"—very God Himself, the King of kings (Rev. 1:5).
 - d. The result? Peace that comes as a result of God's favor (Rom. 5:1).

II. Responding to the Mission

- A. Having received the mission, the shepherds then had a choice to make. What would they do with this news?
- a. Receiving information is not enough. Many think education alone will transform society and its people.
 - b. What if, after the angels had gone back to heaven, the shepherds had said, "That really is good news," but then just went back to watching their sheep?
 - c. You and I are also faced with the same choices. We learn a lot about God in our Christian education classes and Bible studies. What will we do with the knowledge? Will we just keep it as head knowledge, or will we act on it?
- B. The Shepherds decided act on the information; to check out for themselves what the angels spoke about.
- a. "Let's **go** to Bethlehem and **see** this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about" (Luke 2:15).
 - b. The shepherds went to Bethlehem and found Mary, Joseph, and Jesus, just like the angels said they would (Luke 2:16).
 - c. The shepherds could have run off and started telling everyone, "Hey we just saw some angels!" But then everyone would have most likely thought they were drunk or crazy. If they had just run off and starting telling everyone about their experience on the hillside, it would have been more about the angels than about Jesus.
 - d. In checking out the truth of the angel's story, the shepherds were setting a sound example for us. History is full of examples of

people who got “off track” spiritually as a result of recklessly basing their decisions solely on a mountain top emotional experience. While emotion certainly plays an important role in our worship of God, to keep from getting carried away with the emotional high, it’s good to make sure it is really God talking to you. John says, “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but **test the spirits** to see whether they are from God” (1 John 4:1).

- C. Another aspect of the shepherds responding to the mission was their effect on Mary and Joseph.
 - a. Can you picture Mary and Joseph listening to the shepherds’ experience with the angels, and what they said about their baby? Hearing them tell about it would have been comforting and would also have provided additional confirmation of their own experiences.
 - b. The shepherds’ interaction with Mary and Joseph would have reinforced their understanding of their part in God’s plan; how they needed to nurture and protect this special child.
 - c. Luke says, “Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:19).
 - d. When we hear testimonies of what God is doing in the lives of other people, it encourages us in our spiritual lives.

III. Relaying the Mission

- A. The shepherds completed their incredible mission when they took on the role of communicators. Luke tells us they started telling everyone who would listen about the angels’ news and the supporting evidence of finding everything “just as they had been told” (Luke 2:20).
 - a. Once we truly understand the depth of God’s love for us, we naturally want to share that love with others.
 - b. It’s like when there’s a new child or grandchild in the family, or you get the latest high-tech gadget. You want to tell everyone. You want to show everyone.
 - c. When was the last time you were excited about telling someone about Jesus?
- B. Finally, we should also remember the impact the shepherds’ testimony had on those who heard about what happened. Luke tells us, “All who heard it were amazed” (Luke 2:18).
 - a. What were they amazed about? Was it the fact that angels appeared to the shepherds? Was it the shepherds’ account of finding the holy family just as they had been told? Or was this the natural rippling out of the good news of peace and God’s favor for all people?

- b. Amazement at what God was doing was the people's same reaction on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:7, 12). Why is it that people of faith respond with surprise when God moves?
- c. As I mentioned last week, the shepherds telling everyone about the angel's announcement of the birth of Jesus may have made it easier for the Magi when they came looking for the one who was born "King of the Jews."

The shepherds heard the good news and acted upon it! When the angel said, "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people," the shepherds eagerly accepted an active role in getting the news out. This morning, I challenge you to remember back when you first received the good news of great joy. Remember how excited you were when you were first saved, and how you wanted to tell everyone about the God who loves you and forgave you? As a result of their experiences on that first Christmas night, the shepherds made telling the story of Jesus their business. How will you respond to the gift of God's Son? Will you make telling His story your business, too?

JESUS CHANGED MY LIFE
ANNA & SIMEON - I've Moved from Hope to Fulfillment
Advent Worship Series – Week 5
December 30, 2007

WORSHIP SERVICE OUTLINES
 Each worship outline contains all elements needed for your worship service. The order of each service presented is only a *suggestion*. No doubt changes will be needed to accommodate the flow and worship style of your corps. The outlines are flexible and allow opportunities to “cut and paste” as needed. If you are blessed with instrumental or vocal music resources, you may find there is more structured material here than needed. It is recommended that the headings of each section of the service be included in the bulletin.

Announcements and Offering

SB#116 – O come, all ye faithful HC#140 – O Come, All Ye Faithful	TB-496 – Adeste Fideles HC-140	HTD3 –T1 (3 vs.) HCD12-T20
Additional Optional Songs		
SB#113 – Joy to the world!	TB-87 – Joy to the World!	HTD4-T9 (3 vs.)
SB#114 – Light of the world HC#146 – Here I am to Worship	TB-653 – Here I am to Worship HC-146	HCD13-T16
SB#103 – Christians awake, salute the happy morn	TB-476 – same	HTD10-T1 (3 vs.)
HC#121 – Joyful, Joyful	HC-121	HCD11–T11
HC#141 – All Hail the Power	HC-141	HCD13 –T11

Call to Worship:

This is a story of faithfulness rewarded, a tale that takes place where happy endings meet hopeful beginnings. Its characters lie neglected on the edges of the Nativity story, just as they were in real life. To find and enjoy this tale is to discover one more gift under the Christmas tree, just when we thought our celebration was complete.

The story begins at the Temple in Jerusalem, one of the world’s busiest places. Armies of priests hurry by, attending to sacred tasks. Pilgrims arrive from all points of the compass, eager to see the spectacle and worship the Lord. Here, within the Holy of Holies, dwells the Spirit of God. Only here can he be truly worshiped, will he hear prayers and accept sacrifices.

And here, of course, a number of local eccentrics are always on hand. Every public

monument has a few. We tend to ignore these characters, people like Anna and Simeon.
(Why the Nativity?, page 121)

[NOTE: It is recommended that either the movie clip *OR* the drama be chosen for the service—*NOT BOTH.*]

Movie Clip



Jesus of Nazareth (Distributed by Artisan Home Entertainment)

Scene 20

Start: 59:14 Simeon sitting
End: 57:3 Mary and Joseph walking away

Dramatic Reading: Anna and Simeon—The Quiet Ones

HC#10 – The Light has Come	HC-10	HCD1-T10
Additional Optional Songs		
HC#149 – In Christ Alone	HC-149	HCD13-T19
HC#151 – Fairest Lord Jesus	HC-151	HCD14-T11
HC#187 – Jesus, Messiah	HC-187	HCD17-T17
HC#219 – King of Kings, Majesty	HC-219	HCD20-T19
HC#220 – Incarnate	HC-220	HCD20-T20
HC#189 – Come Thou Fount (new Christmas words below)	HC#189	HCD17-T19

Come Thou Fount (words by Geron Davis, Dave Clark and Tony Wood) 2016 Word Music, Woodspring Music, Tony Wood Songs

God of glory, King of Heaven, for this moment robed in flesh.
 Prince of power, strength and honor, now contained in tenderness.
 Hear the shouts from Heaven’s hallways, saints and angels all applaud.
 Praise the Infant in the manger; glory to our mighty God.

Here to break the bonds of evil, here to set the captives free.
 He will triumph; He will conquer, and deliver you and me.
 Hear the shouts from Heaven’s hallways, saints and angels all applaud.
 Praise the Infant in the manger; glory to our mighty God.

Let us live with hope and courage through the trials we face in life.
 He will be our Strength in weakness, our Defender in each fight.
 Hear the shouts from Heaven’s hallways, saints and angels all applaud!
 Praise the Infant in the manger; glory to our might God.

Responsive Scripture:

- Leader:** Let's imagine a white-headed fellow working his way down the streets of Jerusalem. People in the market call his name and he waves but doesn't stop. Neighbors greet him and he returns the greeting but doesn't pause. Friends chat on the corner and he smiles but doesn't stop. He has a place to be and he hasn't time to lose.
- All:** "Now in Jerusalem there was a man named Simeon. He was an upright and devout man; he *looked forward* to Israel's comforting and the Holy Spirit rested on him" (Luke 2:25 TLB).
- Leader:** Simeon's one incredible moment occurs eight days after the birth of Jesus. Verse 27 contains this curious statement:
- All:** "Prompted by the Spirit he came to the Temple."
- Leader:** Simeon apparently had no plans to go to the temple. God, however, thought otherwise. We don't know how the prompting came—but on this side of the event, we understand the prompting. Whether Simeon understood or not, we don't know. We do know, however, that this wasn't the first time God tapped him on the shoulder. At least one other time in his life, he had received a message from God.
- All:** "The Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen him—God's anointed King" (v. 26 TLB).
- Leader:** You've got to wonder what a message like that would do to a person. What does it do to you if you know you will someday see God? We know what it did to Simeon.
- All:** He was "constantly expecting the Messiah" (v. 25 TLB).
- Leader:** He was "living in expectation of the salvation of Israel" (v. 25 PHILLIPS)
- All:** He "watched and waited for the restoration of Israel" (vs. 25 NEB).
- Leader:** But he was waiting with anticipation. Calmly expectant. Eyes open. Arms extended. Searching the crowd for the right face, and hoping the face appears today. . . . In the end, the prayer of Simeon was answered.
- All:** "Simeon took the baby in his arms and thanked God; 'Now, Lord, you can let me, your servant, die in peace, as you said' (Luke 2:28-29).
- Leader:** One look into the face of Jesus, and Simeon knew the hope of his life had been fulfilled.

All: One look into the face of our Savior, and we will know the same.
(One Incredible Moment, pages 35-39)

HC#110 – He is Here	HC-110	HCD10-T10
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Reading:

For years people will relive this remarkable day at the Temple. The joyful message comes through channels no one expected—not through the priests or the crowd favorites but through two old, forgotten relics of good old-time religion.

It comes to them simply because they have been faithful. And one more message resonates through this Nativity story that is filled with messages—the moral being that God rewards the faithful. The Christ child is a gift to all, to those in the past as well as the future. But those who know him will tell you that some of the greatest joys of all are imparted to the wise, faithful servants that the rest of us overlook.

(Why the Nativity?, pages 124-125)

O Come Let Us Adore Him		No CD
Additional Optional Songs		
HC#123 – Shine on Us	HC-123	HCD11-T13
HC#136 – We All Bow Down	HC-136	HCD12-T16
HC#139 – There is a Message	HC-139	HCD12-T19
HC#146 – Here I am to Worship	HC-146	HCD13-T16
HC#219 – King of Kings, Majesty	HC-219	HCD20-T19
HC#220 – Incarnate	HC-220	HCD20-T20
HC#226 – I Worship You	HC-226	HCD21-T16

Congregational Prayers: (Select 2 people from the congregation to read the following prayers from their seats.)

Prayer #1:

Thank you for fulfilling the desire of Simeon’s heart—not only did he see you, but he held you in his arms. And I thank you, Lord, that what Simeon waited a lifetime to see has been revealed for all who will open their eyes. You are the Light of the world. You are the hope of salvation for all who believe. Amen. *(The NIV Worship Bible, page 1375)*

Prayer #2:

Lord, your people waited a long time for your deliverance. But your word is true and at last you came with an anointing of truth and power that has lasted to this day. Still you bind up our broken hearts and deliver us from our sinful bondage. You comfort us and

fill us with joy. You restore our losses and give us new purpose and hope. Now we worship and wait once more with faith for you to come again in power and glory. Amen.
(The NIV Worship Bible, page 990)

Message – I’ve Moved from Hope to Fulfillment

Additional Optional Songs		
SB#104 – Who is he in yonder stall	TB-319 – Who is he?	HTD10-T19 (6 vs.)
SB#89 – Silent night!	TB-800 – Stille Nacht	
HC#139 – There is a Message	HC-139	HCD12-T19

HC#123 – Shine on Us	HC-123	HCD11-T13
Additional Optional Songs		
HC#139 – There is a Message	HC-139	HCD12-T19
SB#101 – As with gladness men of old	TB-276 – Dix	HTD11-T3
SB#124 – Silent night! Holy night!	TB-842 – Stille Nacht	HTD4-T15 (3 vs.)
SB#153 – Thou didst leave thy throne and thy kingly crown	TB-94 – Margaret	HTD10 –T6 (4 vs.)
SB#158 – Who is he in yonder stall	TB-287 – Who is he?	HTD10-T19 (6 vs.)

Benediction:

Lord Jesus, we come with praise and thanksgiving for the marvel and miracle of your birth we celebrate this season. Come once again to us this hour that we may rejoice because you have been born in our hearts. We pray that in all our labors, in all our relationships, in all of our life, you will live and love through us, in all our seasons of life, as our Savior and Lord. In your name, we pray.

(Colonel Henry Gariepy)

Vocal Benediction – HC#140 – O Come, All Ye Faithful	HC-140	HCD12-T20
SB#85 – O come, all ye faithful	TB-552 – Adeste Fideles	HTD3-T1 (3 vs.)
Additional Optional Songs		
HC#61 – Crown Him King of Kings	HC-61	HCD5-T11
HC#141 – All Hail the Power	HC-141	HCD13-T11
HC#149 – In Christ Alone	HC-149	HCD13-T19
HC#151 – Fairest Lord Jesus	HC-151	HCD14-T11
SB#112 – It was on a starry night	TB-535 – same	
HC#180	HC-280	HCD16-T20
HC#260 – Go, Tell it on the Mountain	HC-260	HCD24-T20

Week # 5	
DRAMATIC READING	
Anna and Simeon—The Quiet Ones	
Taken from <i>Christmas Hearts</i> , by Tim Roehl, Barbour Publishing, Inc.	
Topic:	God's promises fulfilled
Scripture:	Luke 2:25-38
Synopsis:	Simeon and Anna wait patiently for the Messiah.
Characters:	Reader 1 – Older woman Reader 2 – Older man Offstage Voice – Man
Props/Costumes:	Modern dress.
Setting:	Bare stage.

Reader 1: Some people see God when no one else can. They are often the quiet ones, unnoticed on earth but famous in Heaven. While the more flamboyant are figuring out new ways to get people to listen to them, the quiet ones are finding new places to listen to God. While the impatient demand their way immediately, the waiters allow God to bring His best in His time. God delights in taking the quiet ones into His confidence. The Almighty chose to share His greatest secret with two of His patient waiters.

They were old. They had little money and even less influence. The movers, shakers, and power brokers of the Temple never even gave Anna or Simeon a second glance as they hurried from one important meeting to another. Heaven, however, leaned in to listen lovingly to their every prayer.

Anna's name meant "grace." She grew up in a home where worship was as natural as breathing. Her parents gave her a love for God's Word and God's house by the obvious way they lived out their love for Him. Even as a young girl Anna could tell when God was whispering special things to her heart. The Spirit of God found in her a heart that loved His companionship. He found far too few like her. The Spirit delighted in filling her open heart, molding it to reflect her name.

Anna married young. Seeing her husband as a gift from God, every morning for seven years she thanked the Lord for her life companion as she woke up next to him. Like every other young wife in her land, she dreamed of being the mother of the Messiah. Pouring out her love for the Lord and praying for her people continued as a natural rhythm in her life. The Spirit delighted in her prayers and let her know it by pouring His love back into her life. It overflowed easily and noticeably to others. Life was good for Anna.

In the seventh year of her marriage, her dream of a lifetime of love with her mate died when she made the painful transition from wife to widow. In the difficult months of sorrow that followed, she faced decisions that would determine her state of heart for the rest of her life. She could let her grief harden into bitterness. She could blame God for her loss and walk away from Him. She could recognize instead how the curse of sin is indiscriminate when it chooses its victims. She could look for another husband and risk

the consequences of marrying on the rebound of bereavement. Anna's options were many. Swirling emotions could have led her down several paths. The advice she received, both invited and uninvited, was as varied as the number of her self-appointed counselors.

During her season of sorrow, the Spirit held her close to His heart, loving her through her pain, reassuring her that He would never leave her. As the ache of her grief was immersed in God's peace, she knew that of all the options presented to her, only one was right. Anna decided her only option was to choose God's option for her life. Instead of blaming God for taking away her gift, she chose to give her heart to the Giver as the Love of her life. It was a decision she never regretted.

Her singleness led her into a new season of life. She emerged from her season of sorrow deepened, sweetened, and even more dependent on the Spirit who so lovingly took care of her. She found herself drawn to pray as never before, finding a level of intimacy with God beyond any human relationship she had ever known.

The Spirit began to trust her with special messages to give to others. As always, she never called attention to herself, but people who hungered to hear from God often found themselves led to her. For many, listening to Anna pray was a rich experience they remembered long after being with her. They noticed in her an intimacy with the Almighty lacking in most of the professional priests. Anna didn't need applause or affirmation from others, she didn't have a position to protect and was oblivious to religious political games. She simply delighted in pointing people to the Lord she loved so much. Just being with Anna made people want to spend more time with God. Many also left a visit with her with a word from God that specifically and directly applied to a situation no one else knew about. Each time she passed along a message from the Spirit, she felt His smile. That was all the approval Anna ever needed.

Over the years, Anna continued to minister in her quiet, powerful way. Decades passed. Some said she was in her eighties; others thought she had been a widow for over eighty years. Age had ceased to matter for her. Her body showed the outward effects of accumulated decades of time, but her smile sparkled with the timeless love in her heart. She continued to pray. She listened to the voice of the Spirit and shared His heart with others as He set up divine appointments for her.

Her hunger for God to move in her nation intensified, and she found herself spending most of her time in the Temple Court of the Women worshipping, fasting, praying and listening. Anna's prayers were sweet music in Heaven. The Spirit spoke quietly to her, letting her know that her time on earth would not be complete until she visibly saw His greatest gift to her and to her people.

Reader 2: Close by in the Court of the Men was another of God's waiters. He, too, was old and had known his share of sorrows during the course of his life. Simeon, whose name meant "listening," was known for his complete devotion and holy lifestyle. Simeon not only listened to the Holy Spirit, he lived out what he heard. Here, too, the Spirit

found a yielded heart all too rare among His people. Simeon also spent much time praying for his people over the course of many years. He too knew the distinct and unique experience of recognizing the voice of God speaking to him. It was a privilege he never took lightly and he experienced it often.

There came a day when the Spirit spoke so vividly and clearly to Simeon that His words became indelibly etched on the old man's spirit. Simeon was praying, as he often did, for "the Consolation of Israel," a common term used to describe God's promised Messiah. Some scoffed at him for even praying like that. After all, there had been no miracle or revelation from God for over four centuries. Religion flowing from the reality of a relationship with a living God had steadily deteriorated into a dead system of rules, rituals, and religious politics. The system was corrupt, God was silent, and the Scriptural promise of a Savior no longer inspired many people. Few could contradict Simeon's integrity, but most could not understand the quality of his spirituality.

In this context Simeon continued to pray, ignoring his detractors. He knew others still prayed as he did. The Spirit made sure His quiet ones knew about each other. Although it was not considered proper for men and women to converse in the Temple courts, Anna and Simeon had a Spirit-initiated connection that led them to quietly encourage each other as faithful listeners to the Spirit's voice.

On that special day, Simeon had been praying as he usually did. Everything seemed ordinary, until his heart sensed the unique stirring when the Spirit had something distinct to share with him. He could never really describe the feeling, because the experience was deeper than an emotion. When the Spirit spoke, He did so on a heart-to-heart basis.

Offstage: *Simeon.*

Reader 2: The Spirit's voice was quiet but clear.

Yes, Lord? came his humble, oft-used response. *Your servant is listening.*

Offstage: *Simeon, I have heard your prayers for Messiah to come. I am pleased with them. You have wondered why you are still here on earth even though you are so old. I know you long to join your loved ones here with Me, but I have kept you alive for a special purpose. Simeon, your own eyes will look upon your Messiah. I want to announce My blessing on Him when His parents bring Him to the Temple for His dedication.*

Reader 2: Simeon's eyes opened wide as he tried to grasp the Spirit's words. Him? An old man most people had long since stopped noticing? Why should he be so honored among all the men of the nation? He didn't question the Spirit's assignment, he just could not immediately comprehend it. What he did understand, he embraced. What he couldn't comprehend, he entrusted to the Spirit.

Yes, Lord, it would be my great honor. Simeon's unspoken words were sweet music in the Spirit's ears. In his heart, Simeon felt the warmth of the Spirit's smile. For him, too, that smile was all the approval necessary.

Simeon expected the special message to precede its fulfillment by only a short period of time. Surely he would recognize the Messiah in just a matter of days, or perhaps weeks! Each time he entered the Temple he took particular notice of all new parents presenting their children for dedication. He continued to listen for the Spirit's nudge.

The dedication of children was a sacred occasion in Israel. Boys were circumcised on the eighth day with the intimate identifying mark of being one of God's chosen people. Later the child's parents were required to bring the child with an offering to "redeem" the child from God. Those financially well-off brought a lamb for sacrifice. Poor parents were allowed to bring two young pigeons. The ceremony was a continual reminder that every child was a gift from God. Parents brought their baby to figuratively return the gift of a child back to the Lord.

The ceremony was also a commitment by the parents to live in such a way that their son or daughter would find it easy to dedicate their lives to God when they could choose for themselves. Ceremonial dedication of children took place daily in the presence of a rabbi, friends, and family. Only the Lord Himself knew the true depth of the parents' consecration at that moment. Time would make visible their true priorities to everyone.

God's timing, however, was not Simeon's. Days became weeks. Weeks turned into months. Months stretched into years. Simeon watched diligently, yearning for the moment the Spirit would speak the identifying word. Through it all he kept praying expectantly. Few knew of his special assignment. Anna knew. Together they waited.

It was an early spring day when Simeon sensed the unique inner stirring of the Spirit's Presence. Something important was about to happen. His heart began to beat faster in anticipation. His spirit seemed to lean forward to listen intently for what the Spirit was about to say. Somehow he knew his years of waiting and listening were about to be over.

Offstage: *Simeon.*

Reader 2: He knew that Voice so well!

Yes, Lord? The stirring inside was so strong he was trembling.

Offstage: *Simeon, today is the day. Go to the Temple. Watch. Today your eyes will look upon your Messiah.*

Reader 2: The Spirit was enjoying this immensely.

Yes, Lord! The joy of an old listener and the Eternal Spirit blended together. Simeon's joy flowed from a heart whose anticipation was about to be fulfilled. The Spirit's joy

flowed from His pleasure in a faithful man. Suddenly Simeon felt as if God Himself was taking his hand. Together they walked out, hand in hand, toward the Temple.

Reader 1: Anna was in her customary place of prayer in the Temple when her heart also heard the familiar stirring of the Spirit. Instinctively she held her breath as she listened. The Spirit spoke. Another waiter eagerly anticipated a divine appointment she had prepared for her whole life.

When Simeon arrived, still hand in hand with the Spirit, his heart raced and his face glowed in anticipation. As soon as he entered the Temple gates, Anna knew Simeon was there even though she couldn't see him.

Reader 2: It would not be long now. Simeon positioned himself so he could see every baby arriving in the arms of his parents. What would the parents of the Messiah look like? A couple, obviously wealthy, walked by with their newborn son. Their sacrifice of a lamb meant they were people of means. Them? No. Another husband and wife, members of a priestly family, entered with a baby boy. Perhaps from a line of spiritual leaders . . . still nothing from the Spirit.

Through the door of the Temple court came a young couple. The mother, barely a teenager, lovingly held an infant boy. The husband carried two small pigeons in hands rough from long hours of hard labor. It was obvious they were not wealthy. No one seemed to notice them in the crowd.

Suddenly Simeon's spirit leaped to attention. This unlikely couple? They were poor. They were simple, humble, nondescript people like so many.

Offstage: *Simeon.*

Reader 2: *Them, Lord?*

Offstage: *Yes, go behold your Messiah.*

Reader 2: Not far away, Anna was hearing the same words.

The old man wobbled in trembling excitement as he wove his way through the crowd to the young couple. He stopped in front of them, speechless, his sparkling eyes speaking volumes.

Joseph and Mary looked into the face of an old man they had never met, but the expression on his face they had seen before—in the faces of shepherds retelling a story of angelic announcements in wonder-filled amazement. In the faces of Zechariah and Elizabeth after their own son's miraculous birth, and now in the face of this man. He knew.

This old man standing before them with the glow of Heaven on his face knew who they were! More importantly, he knew Who their Son was. Once again, Joseph and Mary were humbled and overwhelmed by the protective care of their Heavenly Father. Then the Spirit whispered to them, and they knew who the old man was. A rabbi would perform a ceremony without a clue as to what he was actually doing, but this old man of God would pronounce God's blessing and know exactly who he was blessing. Simeon was God's choice for this sacred moment.

Joseph turned to Mary. The look that passed between them said it all. Without a word, Mary gently put Jesus into the arms of Simeon. The old man who had waited and listened so long was hold the dream of his heart and the Deliverer of the world in his arms at last.

For a long moment, all he could do was gaze into the infant's face. He was much too full of wonder for words to come, so full he ached with the joy pushing open every door in his heart. This Baby, the Consolation of Israel. The Messiah snuggled close to his heart! Jesus looked into the wrinkled, tearstained face of the old listener, smiled, and reached up to give Simeon's beard a baby tug. Joseph, his arm around Mary, couldn't help but give a proud father's laugh at the sight. Mary stood, eyes glistening, her heart recording every moment. Meanwhile, the Spirit had taken Anna by the hand and was leading her to the three faithful hearts and a Baby.

Simeon brought Jesus near until his bearded cheek nestled the Baby's soft infant cheek. What do you say when God has given you the desire of your heart after years of faithful waiting? Looking up, tears of joy still streaming down his face until they were captured by his beard, Simeon's heart overflowed in worship:

“Sovereign Lord, You can now release Your servant in peace as You promised. With my own eyes You have allowed me to see Your salvation; it's now out in the open for everyone to see! Here is Your Light to reveal Yourself to the Gentiles. Here is the One Who will reveal Your glory to Your people Israel.”

Mary and Joseph stood speechless in wonder at Simeon's words. Still holding Jesus, Simeon reached over and put his hand in blessing on Joseph's head, then on Mary's. As his hand rested on Mary, the Spirit whispered something to him. The words thrilled and pained him at the same time. He knew the words were for Mary, so he told her the Spirit's message. As he spoke, he had the look of a man seeing ahead down the corridors of time:

“This Child's destiny is to bring about the failure and recovery of many in Israel. He will be misunderstood and resented because He will reveal people's hearts for what they really are in God's sight. They will reject Him.” Simeon paused and looked at Mary with deep compassion. “And when they do, the pain of a sword will pierce your heart, too.”

Joseph instinctively held Mary closer, and Simeon's hand seemed to rest protectively on her head. Mary, her eyes wide, nodded slowly. More than thirty years later, those words would come back to her as she stood in front of a Cross—her Son's Cross.

Reader 1: Anna had come up to them as Simeon's prophetic words began to flow from his heart. Not wanting to disturb the divine moment, she waited until he was finished and then moved to Simeon's side, her face glowing with the same glory Simeon's face radiated. Mary and Joseph looked into Anna's face, then again at each other.

This old listener knew, too.

Simeon looked down at Anna. Neither spoke, but the two who had waited until the very end of their lives to see the fulfillment of their dreams knew the wait had been worth it. The two aged quiet ones stood with the young parents and their Baby in the middle of the crowded Temple court. Few noticed what took place in that sacred moment there. Few had hearts tuned to the Voice of the Spirit. Few had eyes open to see God when He was right there in front of them.

Only the quiet ones knew. The listeners. The waiters. The ones who let God set the agenda, the time, and the place of their miracle.

Looking down on Mary, Joseph, Anna, and Simeon, the Spirit smiled on them. They basked in the warmth of that familiar Smile.

As it had always been, that Smile was all they needed.

JESUS CHANGED MY LIFE
Advent Sermon – Week 5
December 30, 2007

Anna & Simeon—I've Moved from Hope to Fulfillment

Text: Luke 2:21-40

How many times have I climbed these steps? Although I'm sure the Almighty hasn't added any extra steps at the entrance to the Temple mount, I'm not sure if He hasn't decided to play a little trick on His old friend Simeon and made them a little steeper each year.

Gracious Lord, I thank you that you have promised I will see your Anointed One before I join my fathers. But Lord, this body You have given me is getting tired. I'm not sure how many more times these legs will be able to carry me up the Temple mount.

May the day you bring consolation to Your people, Israel, come soon. I look with expectation to the day of fulfillment of Your promise; Your day of visitation.

I have a vivid imagination. I can see Simeon making his trip to the Temple; communing with God. Simeon was a man of faith, a man of hope. He faithfully lived in harmony with the Spirit, patiently waiting for God to fulfill His promises.

Hope is a powerful, positive emotion. Doctors tell us people with hope are healthier, happier, and live longer than those without hope. Hope for a better result is what keeps sports fans coming back each year. "Surely our team has to do better this year."

Then there are some who live without hope: Virginia was 19 years old and pregnant when she went to live with her 15th set of foster parents. Her case file read like a textbook example of neglect, abuse and bureaucratic failure. She sat silently in a chair, hands neatly clasped, staring into her lap. The foster parents, whose three children were in school, had been apprised of Virginia's story and promised that this placement would be "temporary" (temporary was the story of Virginia's life). Finally, the foster mother said, "Are you frightened, Virginia?" "Kinda," she replied without looking up. Then, "I've been in lots of homes." "Well," the sympathetic woman tried to reassure the bewildered young mother-to-be, "Let's hope this time turns out for the best." Virginia's reply is one of those statements that sticks to your soul—it was flat, without change of tone and without Virginia even looking up—"It hurts too much to hope."

Can you imagine living without hope? Can you imagine the amount of pain it takes for a person to conclude that it hurts too much to hope?

We who claim Jesus as Savior and Lord are to be people of hope. The corps should be a place where hurting, lonely, and empty people like Virginia are transformed and receive hope as a result of their encounter with those of us who have experienced God's grace in our lives.

On this Sunday morning after Christmas, we are going to look at Simeon and Anna; two people of hope who moved from hope to fulfillment as a result of their encounter with the baby Jesus. You may think it's easier for us to look back on the events of that first Christmas. And in some ways it is; for we who claim Christ as Lord, those events are history and the identity of Jesus as the Messiah is settled. But the fact is:

we are still people of faith. There are many aspects of faith and life, which require us to leap beyond the safety of our logic and into the Father's arms, trusting in His love and plan for us. But what does it mean to be a person of faith, living on this side of the manger? We see some wonderful answers in the lives of Simeon and Anna. As we integrate some of the lessons from their lives, we too can be changed from people of hope to fulfillment.

I. A Hopeful Person is Ready

- A. The person of faith is ready because they know the dynamics of faith.
 - a. The writer of Hebrews reminds us, "Faith is being certain of what we hope for" (11:1).
 - b. This means living as a person of faith is: knowing what God has promised is already a reality.
 - c. The faith called for in Scripture is never a fuzzy "Oh, I hope it's so" attitude. Faith always has a specific object to which it is directed.
- B. The person of faith is also ready when they know the demands of faith.
 - a. The person of faith orders his or her life to make it possible to recognize God's hand at work.
 - b. Only those who are spiritual can understand. 1 Corinthians 2:14, "But people who aren't spiritual can't receive these truths from God's Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can't understand it, for only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means."
 - c. People of hope live in harmony with their profession.
- C. The words used to describe a person reveal that person's values and priorities.
 - a. "A people person," "Always too busy to talk to me," "selfish," "makes me feel welcome and important."
 - b. Simeon – righteous and devout (Luke 2:25).
 - c. Anna – worshipped night and day, fasting and praying (Luke 2:37).
 - d. What words would people use to describe you?

II. The Hopeful Person is Responsive when they see God at work

- A. God acts consistently with His nature
 - a. He acts from a basis of Love. He is not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9).
 - b. He acts from a basis of Faithfulness. What He has promised, He will do.
- B. When God does act, people of faith respond in the present.
 - a. Being prepared, and living with a sense of future expectation isn't enough.
 - b. You can probably think of people who are so focused on the future, they become oblivious to God's hand at work today.
 - c. Prompted by the Spirit, Simeon goes to the Temple. When he sees Jesus, he responds from a heart of Faith. He knows God has kept His part of the bargain. Simeon moves from a sense of expectation to a certainty of fulfillment.
 - d. Simeon's response is immediately reinforced by Anna's visit. Anna sees Jesus through the same eyes of faith. Repetition in Scripture is a tool of

emphasis. Here God uses a second witness to drive His message home: Immanuel has come.

- e. How do you respond when you see God at work: with skepticism; with intellectual assent but no personal involvement; or do you leap from hope to faith?

III. The Hopeful Person Resonates - inviting others to join the celebration

- A. The normal response to the Good News (including the Gospel) is to communicate; share it with others. Being prepared, having responded ourselves is not quite enough. The person of faith, when they realize God is at work, wants to share the great news of God's activity with others.
 - a. The shepherds wanted to tell everyone (Luke 2:16).
 - b. Those Jesus healed wanted to tell others (Matthew 9:31; Luke 5:14, 15).
 - c. Remember when you first accepted Christ? You wanted to tell everyone.
 - d. Simeon and Anna make pronouncements about the nature and mission of Jesus.
 - i. In accepting Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promise, Simeon proclaims Jesus is the Christ (2:29). Compare this to Paul's view of Jesus as fulfillment of God's plan (Galatians 4:4, 5).
 - ii. Simeon declares Jesus' mission is one of Salvation (2:30).
 - iii. Simeon also declares Jesus' target is Gentile as well as Jew (2:32).
 - iv. Destined to suffer (2:35).
 - v. When Luke says Anna "spoke about the child" (2:38), she was reinforcing Simeon's message.
- B. Communication often implies invitation as well.
 - a. The clear implication of both Anna's and Simeon's communication about Jesus is to invite those hearing to accept their same conclusion: this child is the Christ, Savior and God.
 - i. Think about the impact on those passing through the Temple that day—especially those who knew Simeon's story.
 - ii. Think about the impact and encouragement this would have for Joseph and Mary.
 - b. When you and I share the Good News, we should ask people to take the next step of accepting Jesus as Savior.

One of my favorite Christmas carols is "What Child is This?" Through the song you and I are asked to consider the questions posed and decide who Jesus is—to us and to the world. When we conclude as Simeon and Anna did (not to mention the Shepherds, angels, Magi, Mary, Joseph, and everyone else we've encountered these past several weeks), we can proclaim with the song writer:

*This, this is Christ the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing,
Haste, haste to bring Him laud,
The babe, the child of Mary.*

Who have you decided Jesus is, and how will you respond this morning?

