

One STRANGE Night

A sermon on Luke 2

There was a dad who was reading his daughter the Christmas story before bedtime. He got to the part where the angels talk to the shepherds and decided to test her knowledge:

And the angels said to them, "Today in the city of David a Savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you, you will find a powerful, well-trained soldier..."

She interrupted, "No dad. That isn't right."

Ok. How about...You will find a democratically elected president?

Ummm...No.

A motivational speaker?

A movie star?

A time-travelling cyborg?

None of those, Dad.

"Then, tell me," he said, "How does it go?"

She smiled and continued, "Today, in the city of David you will find a baby."

The Christmas story sounded strange to the girl.
And she called her dad out on it.

But...

What about this year's Christmas?
Is *this* how the story is supposed to go?

A half empty church.
Unable to visit family.
No parties to attend.
No hugs.
No kisses.
Barely any gifts.

It doesn't seem like this is how Christmas is supposed to go.
Instead, Christmas 2020 seems *strange*.

I. STRANGE Events

But should it feel *strange*?

Let's revisit the night of Jesus' birth. Scripture says, "**In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world...And everyone went to their own town to register. (v.1-3)**"

In the Ancient world, censuses were important. They helped the government learn how much food the people would need, how big of an army they needed to protect their people, how dense to make the population spots on a map and...

Most importantly...

...how much money they needed in taxes.

In the ever-expanding Roman world, censuses are recorded as happening every five years. That's not strange.

What is strange is paying taxes and being forced to register for a census that was demanded by a government you hadn't elected.

Caesar Augustus didn't win the pools.

He simply took over.

He was #NotTheirCaesar.

And this census was forced on them without their asking.

(Kinda like a pandemic...and all the rules and regulations that go with it.)

This census was a not voluntary. You had to partake of it. There was no way that any average Joe...

Or rather...

Average Joseph...

Could avoid the government mandate.

Strange.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth...to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. (v.4)

That's about an 80-mile journey, if the family took the shorter and more strenuous route directly through the desert land of Samaria. If they took the easier walking route along the Jordan River Valley, it was longer.

And Mary was about 8 months pregnant.

I did my research.

I talked to some pregnant ladies.

Going on an 80-mile trip while pregnant isn't preferable.

And there weren't cars back then.

In fact, tradition usually places pregnant Mary on a donkey while Joseph walked alongside it.

But...

Scripture never actually mentions a donkey.

It's possible pregnant Mary had to walk that whole way.

Strange.

Speaking of pregnancy...

He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. (V.5)

Pledged to be married.

Do you see that part?

They had not been intimate together.

Meaning Joseph had no part in producing that child.

This was long before science and test tubes and miracles of modern fertility clinics.

But it's still more amazing.

Because even those clinics need two parts to create life.

This baby in Mary's tummy?
Needed only one part.
God's power.

And suddenly she was showing.
And suddenly people were talking.
And suddenly Aunt May was giving them both the cold shoulder.

There's no family togetherness.
They were outcasts.

Strange.

While they were there...there was no guest room available for them. (v.6-7)

Joseph frantically rapping at the doors.
Knocking at the Super 8.
The Radisson.
The Motel 6 - They didn't even leave the light on!

None of them have space.
And he's running out of time.

Finally, some guy shows him to a pile of hay out near his animals.

And Mary lays down while she's sweating and breathing heavy.
While Joseph is frantically fluffing the hay, wiping away the donkey slobber from the feeding trough and waving his hands in the air to get the nauseating smell of the animals out.

And there's no midwife.
And there's no family.
And there's no epidural.

There's pain.
And fear.
And darkness.

And then...

...The time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger... (v.6)

In the midst of the unwanted mandate, at the end of a strenuous journey, separate from their families, alone in a barn...

A baby.
A son.
The Savior.

II. More STRANGE

But that's not all that's strange about this Christmas.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. (v.8)

In Ancient society, shepherding is a lowly job.
It produces a lowly income.
It is looked as lowly in society.

These guys are probably not wearing the finest fashion.
They probably don't smell the best.
They were probably sitting around a fire, eating some beans and gambling for the file bite with a pair of dice.

Suddenly...

An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

What a strange visitor!

And his face is gleaming
And brilliant.
And can't look straight at him so you cover your face and squint your eyes, incredible!

And they are terrified.

They probably thought he was coming to tell them bad news.

An increase in taxes.
More Roman occupation.
A pack of wolves on its way.

Or worse.

God was mad at them.
God could see they were cheating at dice.
God was about to fry them for all their sins.

Something they knew was right.
They'd done wrong.
They deserved justice.
God's wrath!

But the message is actually much stranger than that.

“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. (v.10-11)

A Savior – as in God wants to save you from all your sin, all your guilt, all your shame.
The Christ – as in God has been prophesying this for millennia. It's always been the plan.
The Lord – as in master, ruler, Chief. The baby is God himself.

His plan would fail.
He's God.
He never fails.

And if that message told to lowly shepherds isn't strange enough, suddenly: Music!

It's not coming from Alexa either: **Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” (v.14)**

Friends, do you get it?

That first “Christmas” was not the Christmas celebration we consider normal.
It wasn’t filled with peace among people, togetherness and joy.
But an unwanted mandate, strenuous work, loneliness, stress, and pain .

But the *strange* events only amplify *strange glory* of Jesus’ arrival.

God had come.
God was born.
God was going to bring peace.

And as strange as this year it has amplified the glory of this message:

God has come.
God was born.
God lived.
God died.
God rose.
God defeated your sin.
God defeated your guilt.
God defeated your shame.

God has brought peace
For you.
With God.

Even during 2020.

Because of your Savior, you are forgiven.

III. STRANGE Response

This strange truth produced strange responses among the people part of that first Christmas.
I pray it produces the same strange responses in us.

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” (v.15)

The one thing shepherds are supposed to do?
Watch the sheep.

And as soon as the angels leave, what do these shepherds do?
Stop watching the sheep.

I suppose they could have brought the sheep with them
But verse 16 says, they “Hurried off to find Mary and Joseph.”
That implies it was fast.
Since it might be hard to “hurry off” when you’re chasing your sheep, I doubt they brought them.

Nothing was more important to the shepherds than seeing their Savior.

1) Hurry to See your Savior.

There is still nothing more important.

Not a certain gift.
Not a paycheck.
Not a type of Christmas cookie.

Not time with a relative.
Not wearing a mask.
Not getting a vaccine.

The most eternally important thing for you to do this Christmas (and always) is see your Savior.

Whether it's in person.
Or online.

With friends.
On your own.

Go; see your Savior.
Because there you see your salvation.

But when they shepherds had seen Jesus, they had more to do:
they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child. (v.16)

Who cares if we need to get back to our flocks...
Who cares if the beans are getting cold...
Who cares if we are getting cold...

We need to tell others about the Savior.
Because they need this good news too.

2) Hurry to tell about your Savior.

If you're watching this online, can you share this with a friend who needs to hear this?
If you're here in person, can you text a friend a line or two from Luke 2 tonight?
If you've got plans to open gifts, eat a meal, and shove 7 candy canes in your mouth tonight, can you first tell your family about Jesus?

Maybe read Luke 2.

Reading Luke 2 rather than watching a Netflix special?

That might seem strange to our world.
But there's nothing more eternally important.

One more thing.
But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. (v.19)

Honestly, this seems odd.
She had such a weird day.

A strenuous journey.
Disapproving looks from others.
Inability to find a room.
Camping out in a barn.
Pain without a midwife.
The smells of the cows.
The birth of her boy.
And strangers busting in telling her that he was the Savior!

Honestly, it seems like the kind of events that you might try to forget with a couple of spiked Egg Nogs.

Not Mary.

Mary treasured them.

Strange as they were.

She treasured these things.

Because God worked his plan through them.

3) Treasure this Christmas.

2020 is unlike any other.

Your Christmas is unlike any other.

But in the Strange sadness of this year...

The strange glory of God is amplified.

God has come.

You are loved.

God is working his plans.

And he is working in your life...

Right here.

Right now.

May this strange Christmas draw you closer to his strange glory.

Amen.