

## Christmas Interruptions

### Luke 1:5-13, 26-38

Thanks for coming to our birthday celebration. We knew our attendance would be down after an evening full of services and lots of people, but I appreciate your faithfulness to come and worship on Christmas day. A day when we could sing, Happy Birthday, Jesus. Actually that was one of our family traditions when our kids were growing up. The first thing on Christmas morning, after opening the stockings was to gather at the table and have coffeecake. And on that coffeecake was a candle and we would sing Happy Birthday to Jesus. Our children still carry out their own version of this tradition. So, Happy Birthday, Jesus. Of course we don't know the actual date of Jesus' birth, but we do know that his birth was not only of great historical significance, but his birth would have great meaning for all eternity.

And so we come to worship this morning on this special day to rejoice. To celebrate the news of Jesus' birth and to feel the real joy of what this day means.

When you think about the message of Christmas, we think about glorious singing, a night of wonder, a message of love and peace. And last week we emphasized the importance of being quiet enough, to listen, to reflect and to pay attention to what Christmas is all about. We sang: "How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given."

But we all know that our general experiences of life do not often allow for those quiet moments. And our journey of life does not always go as smoothly as we would like then to. But that's OK. Because sometimes God may even interrupt our plans or change our course of action and those interruptions and those changes God can use to get our attention. When you think about it, God is a God of interruptions. The word "interrupt" actually comes from two Latin words: the word "inter," which means "into," and the word "rupere" which means "to break." To interrupt means "to break into." And this is what God often does. God likes to break into our lives. Just consider. ...the message found in the Christmas narratives. It conveys that very thought. Zechariah the priest, going about his usual duties is suddenly startled by the presence of an angel who brings him some very unexpected news. His wife would give birth to a son. This son would be the forerunner to the Messiah.

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I share with you a Christmas reading that came this year from Bruce Ough. He is the President of the Council of Bishops for the United Methodist Church. He affirms this very truth of God's action in the Incarnation event and in our lives as well.

"The Christmas story is at its core a story of interrupted and disrupted lives. The Christmas narrative has become so familiar to us that we can't imagine what an unexpected intrusion the angels and the baby and those gawking shepherds were for Mary and Joseph. Imagine how Mary's life was interrupted when the angel Gabriel appeared and told her she would bear God's son. Imagine how Joseph's boat was rocked when he learned of Mary's pregnancy. An angel urged Joseph not to fear .... right! How could Joseph not fear when his whole world had been disrupted by a pregnancy so unexpected, maybe even unwanted? When is the last time an angel intruded on your dreams without it being a significant distraction?

Imagine the disruption of traveling by foot and donkey to sign the tax rolls when nine months pregnant. Imagine the anxiety and disorientation of finding no place to deliver the baby. Imagine the chaos and interruption of fleeing to Egypt to escape the paranoia and hatred of King Herod ... and seriously, can you imagine the constant disruption of raising the son of God? Any child is an intrusion into an ordered adult life, but Jesus?

Mary and Joseph, the entire Christmas story teach us one of the most difficult yet profound truths about God. God fully intends to disrupt our lives. God is constantly seeking to interrupt our lives, commanding our attention, disorienting us, calling us to make room for God in our hearts and our lives. The Christ child is called Emmanuel, which means God with us. Jesus is God's greatest intrusion into the world, into our lives. When God is with us, we are surprised, interrupted, awakened, disoriented. When God is with us, our imaginations are stretched, our love is magnified...Are you ready this Christmas for the disruptions caused by angels and babies? I can see hundreds, even thousands echoing Mary's response to God's intrusion in her life. Here I am, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word."

I know this whole Christmas season can be a hectic, busy time. And many of us think, that it will be good when Christmas is over and we can get back to life as normal. But we know life isn't like that and what we mean by normal doesn't usually happen. There are often surprises,

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unexpected events, and things that happen that we never plan on. And so I am going to interrupt this sermon with a video shown last night at the Christmas Eve family service. It was a message they created about the power of Christ to change our lives. Let's see what message the children have for us. (So, pardon the interruption)

There is power in the name of Jesus, a power to set us free, a power to change our lives, if we will only open our hearts to it.

What if the God who interrupted the natural course of history in the incarnation is also the God who surprises us and may even interrupts us to get our attention. When interruptions come, it's easy to gripe and complain and blame, but I think there's another way we can respond. Henri Nouwen writes these words that I think are full of wisdom and insight:

"While visiting the University of Notre Dame, where I had been a teacher for a few years, I met an older experienced professor who had spent most of his life there. And while we strolled over the beautiful campus, he said with a certain melancholy in his voice, "You know . . . my whole life I have been complaining that my work was constantly interrupted, until I discovered that my interruptions were my work."

What if the God who dramatically changed the lives of those first Christmas characters wants to disrupt our everyday plans and show us new things. What if God's interruptions stir our hearts, and awaken our spirits to make a change in our usual routines, call us to a place of witness or service. And it might make us uncomfortable, even fearful, because the unknown often creates that anxiety. And the word the angel gave to Mary and to Joseph and to the shepherds, needs to be heard by us as well when those unexpected things happen. Do not be afraid...for I am with you...He has the power to break any chains that bind us. By his Spirit he can give us the courage to do new things. The one who is Emmanuel, the one whose birthday we celebrate today, is the One who will be with us to give us courage, to be our strength and guide in whatever future is before us.

I wonder as we celebrate today and approach a new year, we will be aware of God's speaking to our hearts, shaking us when we are complacent, inspiring us by His Spirit, and moving us to deeper faith and perhaps new opportunities for witness and service. Life will bring its interruptions and surprises. But pay attention... You may find that your interruptions are blessings in disguise. You may find God

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speaking to your heart and showing you new things...and leading you in places you never thought you would go.