**Unwrapping Christmas - Christmas Blind Spots**

**Ever notice how we can become so familiar with something we miss the obvious? We do it all the time – when we read, drive. Blind spot that fills in with what ought to be there - mental assumptions - but it can also cause us to sometimes miss things.**

**Selective viewing - Passing the ball - missed the gorilla suit.**

**We do the same with Christmas. We’ve heard it and have assumptions on the holiday– increase in depression as expectations are not met.**

**Luke 1 – Gabriel appears to Mary and Says you will have miraculous pregnancy – but don’t worry it’s all good, God has a plan – he’s the messiah.**

**2 teens - Two teenagers – about to get married – working towards a normal life in a small town…**

**Luke 2:1 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2 (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3 And everyone went to their own town to register. (Puts a pin in history)**

**Why would Jewish people care about the Roman world - because they controlled everything. Israel under Roman rule.**

**Count was for taxes, wanted their money. Just a thought - God used unjust taxes and govt mandates to fulfill his purpose.**

**Things We Don’t Want To Miss**

**1. These were incredibly dark days for ISRAEL – But God was working.**

**Harsh Roman oppression. The bad guys were winning. Under heavy taxes and whatever a Roman told them to do.**

**(Carry my gear a mile… Jesus said walk 2 – Matt 5)**

**God where are you?! 400 yrs since God sent a prophet. To understand - it’s been since pilgrims landed on Plymouth rock. 1620. Has God left us. People were not really expecting this.**

**4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, (pin in the geography) because he belonged to the house and line of David. (pin in biblical prophecy – “city of bread”) 5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.**

**Oh yea, I’ve heard that… But they did not catch a bus. 2 day walk. Nazareth to Bethlehem - 100 miles. Walk from Dallas to Waco - while pregnant… easy. And they don’t have a choice.**

**Roads full of travelers due to the census.**

**Mostly likely traveling w/ other family – walking together. As his family headed back to “City of Bread” by legal order.**

**2. These were incredibly dark days for Joseph & Mary- but was working**

**Go to Bethlehem! Not married, pregnant, hard walk, and in total poverty. We can’t afford this - don’t have time for this - have other responsibilities. Not now… drop everything. They had no say in it.**

**Marriage problems, health problems, money problems - Matt says they narrowly escape Jesus’ murder and run to Egypt. Trouble with the law - some dark days for Joe and Mary.**

**Okay so - Donkey ride to Bethlehem… then right when they get there she goes into labor and they hurried to find a hotel, but there’s no room in the inn, so they’re stuck in a barn or cave) where 3 kings came that night - while a little drummer boy played his drum for him in the corner…**

**No donkey, no barn / cave, no kings, or drummer boy mentioned. Most likely traveled in caravan by cart – not alone.**

**6 While they were there, (don’t know how long…) the time came for the baby to be born, 7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. (pin in his humanity) She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room (the inn) available for them. (pin in humility - humble king)**

**But it was a stable, barn, or cave… right?**

**No room in the kataluma. See pic Joe & Mary were most likely staying with family – “inn” = “upper room” (Acts 2) lit. “guest room” Full house - elders get priority upstairs. Why the animal trough? It was common for animals stay in the lower level.**

**Placed in a manger / feeding trough. Luke brings it up a lot.**

**After the Exodus Passover was established (Ex 12) every Jewish home had an indoor manger - to keep a lamb in their house during Passover. That Jesus might have been placed in the very Passover lamb trough is of enormous significance - a miracle.**

**There for both my girl’s birth - video in Lamaze did not prepare me - like all births Jesus entered the world thru pain, agony, blood, and love. God on earth was a blood smeared, crying, hungry little baby… before we could theologically analyze it.**

**The nativity makes for a peaceful figurine - But it wasn’t that pretty. The Silent Night we sing about was probably pretty stressful.**

**Maybe you see the holiday’s the same way they did: money / traveling / accommodations / a full house / crying babies…**

**Do you ever wonder why God chose to arrive this way? Perhaps, we could know in our not so silent nights… God is with us.**

**Luke 2:8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.**

**Mostly likely spring – they would not be living there in winter.**

**9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. (First evangelist was an angel – where the word evangelist comes from)**

**Terrified! Glory of God appeared… we tend to miss the weight of what they saw in our nice nativities. Powerful moment!**

**3. This was incredibly significant for the Shepherds**

**These ninja vets – seen as unimportant – Low level Levitical job – Hired by priests – These were no ordinary shepherds.**

**Caring for Passover lambs for temple sacrifice. The lambs were to be spotless - under a year old. Shepherd priests.**

**The announcement of the Law – Moses a shepherd.**

**The announcement of the temple – David – a shepherd.**

**The announcement of Jesus – shepherds.**

**Jesus – the great shepherd. God caring for mankind!**

**Jesus was not created that day… Jesus is God with us, “Emmanuel” – the Alpha and Omega became a man that day – The infinite became an infant – Our big God became a baby. Messiah – the promised anointed one – all the OT promised.**

**\*\* This was an announcement of a future career change.**

**(This is what to look for… the manger) 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” (Baby burrito in a food trough – the baby lambs’ clothes) 13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, (1 turned to thousands upon thousands!) 14 “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” (Peace! World needed then and needs now.)**

**Then they were gone – moment of decision. Go back to work or go find this Jesus. How could they go back after that?**

**15 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.” (Let’s go!!) 16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. (Again, and again – manger – a nasty animal food trough for a Passover lamb – birth of the lamb)**

**The contrast of the heavenly glory – to a place where the savior lies – would have been extreme and powerful.**

**God of Glory with the riches of heaven – born in the flesh and born into poverty – so we might be rich in spirit in Him.**

**17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. (More than just Joe and Mary.)**

**There were no angels at his birth – no stars at his birth. Only a noisy stressful house full and a new baby – and some excited shepherds.**

**19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. (God had only revealed to Mary and Joe that Jesus was a savior Immanuel – but had no idea what was going to happen in Jesus’ life.)**

**God did not tell them – they had a walk 2 days – or not have room or bed – or a wild escape to Egypt – or his early death.**

**They did not know what was going to happen. Though planned for eternity past – they were only given a glimpse.**

**22 When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, (Leviticus – 66 days after birth - make a sacrifice for your first-born son - boom the story jumps 3 months) Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”), 24 and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons.” (This significance is often missed)**

**Why a sacrifice? Points to the Passover. Sacrifice on the door posts - Lord passed over. (explain) But your first born still belongs to me (type of tithe) So, from this day forward - instead of leaving him at the temple – offer a sacrifice and buy / redeem him back. Reclaim him. Price a lamb (purchase) and pigeon or dove (for sins)**

**Where is the lamb in Luke 2? They gave 2 birds. That is because God had an exception clause – that if anyone was determined to be too poor, they could sacrifice two birds.**

**This is what was happening! They were dead broke.**

**We see the sacrificial lamb – all through this chapter.**

**4. The humble perfect sacrifice of Jesus is repeated over and over**

**From the shepherds, to the manger, to the temple sacrifice Images of the sacrifice of Jesus – the lamb of God - are all though out this chapter.**

**Things We Don’t Want To Forget**

**1. God works in the SHADOWS.**

**Next part of Luke 2 - great story follows – Simeon, waited whole life to see the Messiah - saw Jesus and breaks out into a praise song! Again, Mary and Joe marveled at what was said - still learning as they move forward.**

**Joseph and Mary did not knew what was going on. Mary a visit – Joe 2 dreams. That was it – limited information and instructions.**

**I would prefer he work in the light… so I could see what He is doing – and may help God out. Only this… God does not need our help.**

**We see again and again in the Bible – God who works in the shadows and behind the scenes – to accomplish His will.**

**We can’t judge what God is doing by what we see – we trust in what we know about God and in what we don’t see = FAITH.**

**God tells us what to do - He doesn't always tell us what He will do next.**

**God is clear on what to do – his Word. But we like to fill in the blind spots and assume what He will do next. “If I do this, he will do this…” but it does not always work out like that.**

**Walk with Jesus and you will find yourself pondering, marveling, and thinking about what just happened – this was not what they expected.**

**Isaiah 55:** **8 “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord. 9 “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.**

**God does not do consulting. He does God. He does not take input. And If He sat with us and tried to explain it you – we still would struggle. The why stage for kids? They can only understand so much… no matter how you say it. Why?**

**2. God shows up IN the CRISIS.**

**Jesus came in the dark of night, in the darkest of times…**

**God usually shows up in the crises – not often before. I would prefer it then. ON this earth - He is not a God who always keeps us from hardship – but guides us through hardship.**

**Acts 14:21** **They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, 22 strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said.**

**Psalm 23:** **The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures: he leads me beside the still waters. 3 He restores my soul: he leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. (Now notice the change…) 4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for you are with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: (dinner with your enemies) you anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.**

**Not kept from Valley – but lead in the valley. The turning point happens in the valley (He to You) The valley is in this life - we are led up, down, and thru the valley’s dangerous places by the shepherd. The shepherds that night knew this well!**

**3. God follows his own TIMETABLE.**

**Jesus came in the dark of night, in the darkest of times - but always right on time. 5000 years of prophecy – culminating on that day.**

**I think of how we wrap and put gifts under a tree – only to wait for Christmas. The gift was ready – but at just the right time they are opened. Jesus revealed himself and died for our sins – and will return – at just the right time.**

**We make assumption on how and when God should work – but he makes the call. Again - that is why it is called faith.**

**And - when God finally did show up, he seemed to disappear again.**

**Angels show up – Jesus is born – things are about to change! A new day… but then nothing for 2 years (the magi) and then nothing for 10 yrs (short mention) and then nothing for 18 years - and then 3 yrs (ministry) and then killed! Gone three days – then Alive! This is it now! Only to leave 40 days later. I’ll be back… Now 2000 years later… God where are you?**

**2 Peter 3:8 With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. (He has only been gone a couple days…)**

**Christmas reminds us that patience is something we will never stop learning. His plan and his timetable are so diff than ours. We listen, we follow, and we wait.**

**A crisis of faith is when what we expected is not happening.**

**Usually, God did not do what you thought he should do. But we forget – God is charge – and always on time for his glory.**

**Luke 2:11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.**

**If you need a savior, then you are in need of saving - we are in a mess.**

**Good news – the savior has arrived!**

**Bad news – that is because you need a savior!**

**And as those shepherds made a choice after hearing the good news – so do we - The invitation to come to Jesus requires a response. They said - let’s go find Jesus – what will you do?**