

Sermon Preached by Pr. Jennifer Rose

Jan. 3, 2016

“The Surprise of Christmas”

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

A chauffeur had driven a chemistry professor to dozens of speaking engagements. He'd heard the same canned speech scores of times. He said on the way to another engagement, "Professor, I believe I could give your speech myself; I've heard it so often." The professor said, "I'll bet you \$50 you can't." "You're on," said the chauffeur. He stopped the car and the two exchanged attire. They came to the banquet. The chauffeur dressed in a tuxedo, sat at the head of the table and was introduced. He stood up and gave the speech verbatim. There was a standing ovation when he was finished.

The emcee got up and said, "You know, we are so fortunate to have such a fine resource with us tonight, and since we have a little extra time, let's have some questions and answers. The first question was asked and the chauffeur stood there dumbfounded, clearing his throat in nervousness. Finally he said, "That's just about the dumbest question I ever heard. In fact it is so dumb I bet even my chauffeur could answer that question."

How many times have you heard the Christmas story? I'm sure many could come up here today, and tell the story. Maybe you feel like Mr. Chauffeur and feel like you could come up and deliver the message today. And really, you're probably right. The Christmas story is so familiar. And by now, we're tired of hearing it. In many of our homes, the tree is already down and the ornaments are put away – and we come to church and have to hear the Christmas story again???

We've heard it many times. Most of you can even answer the tough questions like , "Did the wise men really see Jesus in the manger? Just how many wise man were there? And that's good. There is tremendous value in knowing the facts.

But today I want to come to the Christmas story with fresh minds, fresh ears and eyes, to hear this in a new way today. When you think about it, this story is full of surprising things. As a matter of fact, probably nothing that the average Jewish person thought would happen, actually did. There were many surprises in the Christmas story.

Just like the little girl who came home from Sunday school triumphantly waving a paper. "Mommy!., my teacher says I drew the most unusual Christmas picture she has ever seen!" The mother took the picture from her little girls hands -- she studied it for a moment and she too concluded that this was the most peculiar picture of Christmas she had ever seen.

"This is wonderfully drawn, but why do you have all of the people riding in the back of an airplane?" The mother gently asked. "It's the flight to Egypt," the little girl said, with a hint of disappointment because the picture's meaning was not immediately obvious. "Oh" the mother said cautiously "Well, who, is the mean-looking man at the front?" "That's Pontius the Pilot," the girl said now visually impatient. "I see"

And here you have Mary and Joseph and the baby" the mother volunteered. And studying the picture silently for a moment, she summoned the courage to ask, "But who is the large man sitting behind Mary?" The little girl sighed. "Can't you tell? That's Round John Virgin!"

That's a cute story -- but the reason I tell it is because sometimes we are like that little girl...

We think we see things so clearly, we think we know all that there is to know about the Christmas story, gleaned all there is to glean, but perhaps we don't see it as clearly as we think. So let's think about this story a little bit... Suppose God gave us the job of selecting the parents for the Messiah -- if we are honest we would have to admit that we would not have chosen Mary and Joseph in a million years. A teen-age girl, engaged to a blue collar worker. We would of wrapped him in a wealthy experienced family... right? The wise men did not recognize the baby either...

Remember when the wise men came to Jerusalem searching for the Messiah? Where did they go? They went immediately to the palace and the said, "WHERE IS HE WHO IS BORN A KING?"

That was a normal response/an obvious place to look -- after all, AN OBVIOUS PLACE TO LOOK FOR A KING IS IN A PALACE, RIGHT?.

The incarnation.. the baby Jesus is the irony of all times. God became a man. Heaven opened herself and placed her most precious one in a human womb. Our God, in one instant, became flesh and blood. The one who was larger than the universe became a microscopic embryo. And he who sustains the world with a word chose to be dependent upon the nourishment of a young girl.

The timing of the whole thing was also completely unexpected. If we were in charge we would not have chosen the time of Caesar August. We might have chosen the time when David was King, a time when

the Jews became the world's super power. They had momentum, wealth, influence and opportunity. Wouldn't it seem natural, after David died, for the Messiah to be the successor?

Or Maybe we would have chosen the 20th century... With air travel and satellite communication in space and television... It seems like it would have been the perfect time for Christ to come.... His message could almost instantaneously be seen around the world... His miracles captured by CNN.. He could even be interviewed by Barbara Walters... Have his picture on the cover of Time magazine....

If we asked a public relations expert they would say, that the 20th century would have been the perfect time for Christ to come... Mass communications, fast travel, and the world just crying out for true leadership. But God came to dwell with men in first century Palestine. At the perfect time.

If we take the time to think about and study it, we will see that God's timing was perfect. God is control of history and he sees things that man cannot see. and God knew the exact moment that would bring about the greatest impact... first century Palestine...

The Bible says Jesus was crucified from the foundations of the world.. It wasn't an accident... God picked out the perfect time in history. And God was right it was the perfect time... The Gospel message spread throughout the Roman Empire and the World like wild fire.

Jesus was born in a small village town called Bethlehem... we probably would have chosen a powerful and influential city like: Jerusalem, Rome, or Athens... Bethlehem was so small and insignificant that when Joshua (after conquering Canaan) allotted the towns to the various tribes it was not even mentioned... Micah proclaimed that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem...but a week before Christ's birth, Mary was still in Nazareth... 80 miles away from Bethlehem... And in a day where they walked everywhere they went, that was a long way.

But God was in control and He took care of that. Caesar Augustus order a census be taken, and this census required that Joseph be register in the city of his family's roots (David's).... Bethlehem.

So Mary and Joseph at just the right time made the four day journey to Bethlehem...You ladies who've had children how would you like to take a four day trip on the back of a donkey about that time? (I bet it was a lot of fun) Don't you ever kind of scratch your head at this story? It is a crazy story, when you really think about it. I mean, we are talking about God's son being born to a virgin... Almighty God,

coming down to earth and living with man... This is not something that happened everyday. This is big news.

Yet, listen to how scripture describes this event, "THE TIME CAME FOR THE BABY TO BE BORN AND SHE GAVE BIRTH." That's it, all so ordinary. The same wording could be used of any baby. No wonder we overlook or are not impressed with his package.. look at the mail carrier God chose. SHEPHERDS!

Now, shepherds weren't the most influential people of the day. As a matter of fact, they were among the lower class of the day. Many were migrants, who ate and slept with the animals, and no doubt smelled like them too. The sophisticated people, rolled their eyes and kept their distance whenever they came walking down the road. If we were asked to send the angels somewhere to make this announcement to: we probably would have chosen someone like: AN ANCIENT UPS system or something.

God is bigger than what most of us think.. The baby Jesus didn't come wrapped in a very predictable package, or one that we might have chosen for him – but maybe that is the point. God is unpredictable – we don't always know exactly what God's plans are for our lives, but in this New Year, we come again, trusting God and praying for a new year full of blessings. This day, and every day, may we realize God's presence among us, in the surprising and also in the mundane parts of our lives. Thanks be to God. Amen.