

Intro: Welcome to Christmas 2020! It is NOTHING like what we expected...but we made it!

MASKS NOT W/FAMILIES FINANCIAL CHALLENGES HEALTH ISSUES

We don't get to light and blow out candles at Candlelight Service! We are here: Feel like deserve trophy!

Despite all of those issues, I am excited to bring you a message of ENCOURAGEMENT tonight!
As I was reflecting this week on Christmas, what we are going through, occurred to me, 1st was similar!
Sometimes we create a very sanitized, romanticized, "Hallmark" Christmas in our minds...Not that Way

But, in exactly the same way that God was at work that first Christmas, He is working around us today

4 Lessons From The First Christmas

Lesson # 1: When It Feels Like God Is Silent, He Is Simply Working Behind The Scenes.

This is probably the only time you will be in church and hear a part of a message from a blank page!
Most (not every) bible, has a blank page between the OT and the NT. If you are familiar, 400 years
Most biblical scholars refer to them as the "Silent Years" Because after Malachi 4 Prophecy John Baptist

Now, for the most part, we gloss over it. We are like...OK. Doesn't affect ME: All so long ago: So What?
And, because there are no Prophets speaking or Writing, No Scripture being recorded, we think, God
isn't at work! That isn't true! Just because God isn't SPEAKING, It doesn't mean He isn't WORKING!
A LOT of things were going on behind the scenes...we just don't SEE it happening...Only see affects!

~Fulfilling Prophecies: All different kinds of prophecies about world government Nation of Israel
were fulfilled during the silent years. In fact, some prophecies so accurate: Many wanted to
believe they weren't REALLY prophecies...written after the fact! God was at work!

~Roman Empire: Road System, Common language, Common currency all contributed to the
rapid world wide spread of the gospel. God was preparing the way!

~Favored method of execution was developed: Preparing the way for Psalm 22 to be lived out

~Angels started moving; Wise Men were studying, probably traveling...

Here is what I want you to see: There were NO new prophets, no new prophecies, God seemed silent
But He was at work...all through those years...putting every single piece in place on the stage of the
world scene to prepare for and accomplish His perfect will!

APPL: If it sounds a little "quiet" in your life right now, Not hearing from God...be encouraged!

Listen, that is Good News for us isn't it! While it might FEEL to some of us God is silent 9 months, He
hasn't been! He is just as surely at work today as He was then! Just because you don't see it doesn't
mean He isn't at work!

1. Trust His timing: Rom says *at Just right time, Jesus came and died for us...*
2. Wait for His Word: Don't move too soon...don't wait after you hear...Hear...and Do
3. Abide in Obedience: In the meantime...Keep doing the right thing
(Zechariah: Priest, waiting for Messiah; Husband, Waiting for a child:
When God spoke to him, He was faithfully in the temple, serving God...doing right thing!)

2. When YOUR Plan Isn't Working, Look for HIS Plan...He Has One!

There were all kinds of people in the story of the first Christmas that had plans that God changed!

~Joseph: Plan: Engaged, Married, Baby: God turned plan upside down

~Zechariah: Plan: He and Elizabeth were going to have children...Didn't work that way

~Shepherds: Plan: Quiet night around the campfire! Off on a wild goose chase angels

~InnKeeper: Plan: Didn't include being known for 1000's of years as hard hearted man!

~Herod: Plan: Remembered as an amazing King...Instead known as awful Tyrant!

Yet, every single one of these...and MORE...were part of God's plan of redemption!

APPLIC: Here is my encouragement. In 2020 all of our plans got thrown out! But...God is STILL at
work! Instead of looking at what ISN'T working..what didn't happen, Do This. Pray:

God, SHOW ME WHAT YOU ARE DOING...HELP ME SEE YOUR PLAN! Get on THAT page!
Don't be the InnKeeper...Don't be Herod...on the WRONG side of God's plan! Never works well!

3. God OFTEN Is At Work Through What We See As “Bad” Events.

When things don't go according to our plan, we see them as “bad”...when in fact they might be Good.

Not only might they be GOOD...they very well might be GOD!!!

That is the story of the first Christmas. Seen from personal perspective, Bad: God's Perspective: Good

~Joseph: His fiancé is pregnant...and He KNOWS he isn't dad!

Bad: No...God Virgin will be with Child, give birth to a son: Immanuel

~Travel: 70 miles @ 9 months: Donkey/Cart/Walk

Bad: No...God: For you Bethlehem Judah, Out of YOU come shepherd/ruler

~Infertility: Elizabeth/Zechariah: Years of heartbreak, disappointment, emptiness

Bad: No: In Womb, FIRST to welcome Son of God

Jesus said of John Baptist: He is the GREATEST man that ever lived!

Oh, they waited for Him...but John was an amazing Man of God...

APPLIC: That first Christmas was FULL of events that seen from the perspective of those living it...were simply awful. Yet God was at work. And He is at work in YOUR awful as well.

He is at work in the loss, He is at work in the pain, He is at work in the uncertainty. LOOK FOR HIM

If you have something that you see as bad...and it may be...Do this.

Ask God to show you how HE can take it and make good come from it.

Rom 8:28 “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him who have been called according to his purpose.”

Listen, you can curse the hurt, and the pain, and the struggle. OR You can bring it to God: REDEEM IT!
To Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above anything ever ask or imagine....

4. God Speaks To Those Who Are Listening For His Voice.

I have always been fascinated by the fact that the religious leaders Herod asked “where Messiah born” knew the answer! Pointed Him directly toward Bethlehem. BUT...They weren't ready!

Others were! God was talking to ALL Kinds of people...and they heard Him!

~Zechariah heard from God: In temple, worshipping and serving: Angel Spoke

~Mary heard from God: At home, totally unexpected

~Joseph heard from God: Something he didn't WANT to hear!

~Shepherds heard from God: Out in the fields at night

~Wisemen heard from God in Another county!

Yet...the people who where SUPPOSED to be LISTENING from God, Helping others hear...CLUELESS!

Even when Wisemen showed up, “Following Star” Answered question: NO ONE WENT WITH THEM!

Why not?

- Too Busy:
- Already Knew it all:
- Not Open:

Herod: Building HIS Kingdom, Not Gods
Religious Leaders Knew OT...Every detail: Didn't know God
Joseph Listened, Mary Listened (let it be to me) Shepherds went

God speaks to those that are listening: Are you Listening? This coming Sunday Pastor Orin has a fantastic message about “What We Have Learned from 2020” Great things to say about this very topic...Hope you will come back and Hear it!

4 Lessons From First Christmas

- God is working...even in silence Are you trusting Him to do that?
- God has a plan...When yours falls apart... Are you open to HIS plan?
- God works...through what we think is bad Are you looking for His hand?
- God speaks...To those that listen! Are you listening?

PRAY: God...Help us see and be open to what You are doing...even when it isn't what we would do!