

Unexpected Christ

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: Proverbs 3:5-6, Hebrews 11:32-38

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How many of you have already opened gifts this morning? How many of you haven't opened gifts yet? You're waiting until after service. About half and half, how many parents are using the gifts as a reward if you sit through service and you do a good job, right? Yeah, that's what I thought. Probably a lot of you. Yes. You see, if you're here at ten 30 a.m. on Christmas morning, and you went out and temperatures that were below zero, I have to believe that there's one of two reasons. The first reason is you really love Jesus. And so you want to be here. And so you want to celebrate this.

The other reason is maybe you're trying to earn some extra points, right? I mean, it is Christmas morning and it's cold outside. Now I hate to disappoint you, but that's not how this works. We don't earn points by coming to church or putting money in the offering plate. Fortunately for us, that's not how this works. Of course, we don't win God's favor by going to church instead. God's love and forgiveness is based on his grace and mercy, not based on our effort.

So with that said, if you want to get up now and leave because you thought you were earning extra points, you can do that. All right? But for those that are still here and you have children, how many of you remember holding your child for the first time? How many of you remember that? It's something that, in my mind, I will never forget. I had a lot of emotions that were running through my mind and my heart. The first emotion was terrified. I was terrified with that first child that I was holding. It was amazing.

I was amazed at the beauty, the miracle. Of giving birth, it was humbling. It certainly was beautiful. It was a moment that I will not forget. And I can tell you that in the birthing process, I was certainly happy that there were nurses and doctors there to help because I was a mess. I was panicking. I didn't know what to do. I didn't know what I was supposed to do. I was really glad that I was really just there for emotional support. Moral support.

That was my whole job. The whole giving birth process is no joke. I remember bringing Micah, my oldest home from the hospital and trying to sleep that night. We were up in Michigan. And I remember bringing him home and, you know, we set up the pack and play in the bedroom. We had to rent a place there. And so we stayed and we put up the pack and play and I remember changing his diaper and making sure he was fed and laying him in the crib. Of course, back first, right? Now that's what they tell you. So we put him on his back.

And I remember then getting in bed and doing our devotions, and we got home late from the hospital that Saturday night. And so the next day was actually going to be Easter. It was April 3rd that year. And I remembered his laying in bed. And there was no way I could fall asleep. I had all of these emotions running through. And then I'm hearing him breathe. You know, I should have invested in earplugs then. But I'm hearing him breathe and it just didn't sound right. It didn't sound normal. And so I didn't sleep the whole night. I remember waking up the next day, you know, or thinking that I was waking up and everything was crazy.

Now, I share that with you because some of you have experienced that. You know what I'm talking about. Now, I want you to try to imagine Mary and Joseph. This is what we are here on Christmas Sunday morning

celebrating the birth of baby Jesus. This is obviously the first child for Mary and Joseph. So they've not experienced this before. If they were like most of us, they probably had plans on how this was going to play out. They had probably picked the best hospital in Nazareth, right?

Let this whole delivery was going to take place. They had the best doctor chosen. And so they had all of these plans. That is, until the census changed everything. He now had to travel with a 9 month pregnant woman trying to take care of her. And as they traveled, they find themselves in a town of Bethlehem that they are not familiar with. Now, maybe some of their immediate family was traveling with them because it was a census, and so obviously his parents would have had to have traveled to Bethlehem as well, to register, but we don't read anything about them in scripture.

We don't know who is there to help them or to talk with them. But obviously, they don't have great connections in Bethlehem because they're staying in a barn, right? A cave. They don't have any great connections there. And so when they arrive, they end up really in a cave, which by the way, my wife asked a great question the other night. When we were reading this story to our kids, I had never thought about this before. She looked at me and she said, why didn't anybody give up their room or their bed for Mary? Why wouldn't anybody do that?

I mean, you see this woman that's 9 months pregnant about to give birth and not giving up their bed. What about the innkeeper? What kind of innkeeper tells this 9 month pregnant lady that comes to your door and looks like she's about to give birth, sorry. You can go stay in the cave out back. As she is sleeping in his comfortable bed that night. Think about the regret that he later had when people started saying this was the messiah that had been born in his cave out back. That he didn't give up his bed.

I would bet that he wished he made a different decision that night. But Mary and Joseph arrive in the barn or the cave and they don't know what to expect. They feel alone. They had to be scared. There's no way that they knew the magnitude of that night. And what was happening, this truly was an unexpected messiah. This baby that was being born into the world, consider the story that we are celebrating today.

Thinking about how scared they would have been, of the unknown, the uncertainty of what life was going to look like. What were they going to do in the next days and weeks and months? Would they ever be able to travel back to Nazareth? Would they be healthy with Joseph be able to have a job to provide for his family? Can you think of all the fear and the anxiety that they would have had? And so as we celebrate this moment and we look back at this moment as a beautiful moment in history, I asked the question this morning, what has you terrified right now?

What has you scared right now? Does your life seem to be spinning out of control? Is there something in your life right now that isn't going according to plan? You had it all figured out. And then something happened. And it changed everything. Are you venturing into the unknown? Of what is happening? Is it possible that right now God has you in a situation that has huge implications for his story? So the question is, will you remain faithful?

Will you trust him? Will you walk with him in the midst of the unknown? Maybe something strange has happened in your life and you think, why is this taking place? Why is this happening? But God has a plan. And so I want to take just a few minutes to talk about that this morning. So let's pray, and then we will ask some questions. Heavenly Father, we gather here on Christmas morning. To celebrate the birth of our messiah, our savior, Jesus Christ.

And of course, we know that he came and stepped into his creation, knowing that he was going to be offering his life as a sacrifice for us. You loved us that much. You want a relationship with us that much. That you stepped into your creation. To give your life in our place, and so we thank you for that. And lord, for

those of us that are here, we're all going through something different this morning. Maybe Christmas morning isn't a day of celebration for us.

It's a day of anxiety and stress and the unknown. Lord I pray that as this unexpected messiah entered into creation. That this morning, we would experience him. In his fullness. We asked this in Jesus name, amen. Every single one of us makes the choice. Every day of our lives, whether we're going to live in faith or live in fear. We really can't control all of the things that happen to us.

We can't control the decisions that other people make. We can't control the world and the environment in which we live, but you and I can control how we will respond to what happens to us. We control our own choices, our own decisions, and again, we can choose to live in faith or to live in fear. Proverbs chapter three versus 5 and 6 has trust in the lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

As we read the story of Mary and Joseph, we see that they lived by faith. They showed this by their actions. They could have made the decision when the census was required by the Roman government that they could have tried to hide in Nazareth. They could have said, you know what? We're in a really bad situation. We're about to give birth, and this is our first time, and this whole thing is confusing, but they didn't. They made the trek to go to Bethlehem. They decided to live by faith.

They decided to take that long journey, knowing that it would change all of their plans that they had laid out. They didn't even know where they were going to stay when they got there. I can't imagine this. I can't imagine not knowing where you're going to stay after you are traveling hundreds of miles to this location on the back of a donkey walking in difficult situations and difficult environments and terrain. In my own life, we I like to plan everything. I am OCD.

And so I've got to know what's coming up and what's happening. And so when we plan vacations, we always plan, where we're going to stay, how long we're going to drive, we try to put that all together. There was one time when we only had Micah, he was young, and we were taking a trip to Myrtle Beach. And we just decided to kind of go on a whim. And we said, okay, we may drive the whole way. But if we get tired, we'll just stop somewhere and stay the night in a hotel. And so we begin our journey and we get to North Carolina and we begin driving and we get to Winston Salem.

And we start to get tired. It's getting dark and Micah was young at the time. And so, you know, he was starting to get cranky. We had been in the car all day. So he said, okay, let's just pull over and try to find a place to stop. And so we get to the first hotel, and we go up and we say, hey, you know, we're looking for a room, and they said, sorry, we don't have any place to stay. Like, what do you mean? You don't have any, you don't have any place to stay. You don't have a room. So we go to the next hotel, and we stop there, and we say, hey, we just need a room for the night. And they said, sorry, we're full. There's no vacancy. We don't have any room. And so finally, by the second or third place, we stopped. My wife said, what's going on?

We come to find out that it was wake forest homecoming weekend for football. And so every hotel was booked. The one time we don't make plans, right? And so I remember I was scared. I had anxiety. Here we have this young child and I have my wife and finally we get a hold of somebody and they said, hey, we have a friend that works over at the super 8 motel, and they have one room that's available. And those of you who already are kind of groaning, you maybe know super 8 motels, right?

And so we go to the super 8 motel and, you know, the place was sketchy. That's all I can say. It was just, it was scary. It didn't smell right, but it was the only place that had a room. And so, you know, we booked that room, and I remember going in and Carolyn, my wife didn't even want to touch anything. I mean, it was just kind of gross. Fortunately, we had to pack in place. So we put Micah in the pack and play. You know, I don't

know what we did with the sheets that night on the bed, or how we slept, but the one time we didn't plan, right?

And I remember that feeling of the unknown and not knowing what is going to take place. And are we even safe? But here are Mary and Joseph, and a lot more difficult situation, and they make this journey to Bethlehem. Believing that God would be with them. Have you ever thought about that? They made this trip believing that God would be with them. Think about that for a moment. It's funny to even say that because guess what? God was actually with them, right?

In the flesh, Jesus was inside the womb. He was with them on this entire journey that they would take. Proverbs chapter three versus 5 and 6 says to trust in the lord, to submit to him to believe in him, to trust in him with all your heart. And so this morning, I asked the question, where does my faith need to grow? Maybe something's happened in your life or in our world over the last few months that you've begun to question God. Why would he allow this to happen?

It could be anything. It could be the loss of a loved one. The loss of a job, the wars that are taking place in our world. Could be disobedient children. It could be broken relationships. And at the very least, you're just saying, God, why would you make me go through this? This was not part of the plan. And so this morning, we're reminded of the story of Mary and Joseph. It would have been easy to doubt God in that moment. But he was faithful and he had a plan. God was working his will out in their life.

Mary and Joseph couldn't see it at the time, but they continued to walk by faith. My prayer is that you and I will continue on this faith journey together. We don't have all of the answers, but that we would strive to continue moving forward one step at a time and faith and not fear. Many of you already know this, but I love the fact that we serve a God who can use our story of faithfulness to be an encouragement to somebody else.

All of you have been encouraged by the faithfulness, the story of somebody else, sometimes that story isn't just an encouragement to you, but it is life altering. And so I asked the question, are you experiencing something right now that God is going to use as a part of his larger plan? We often don't think of this in the moment when we're going through a hard situation that maybe God has us right in the middle of his story. And this story is going to be used.

It's part of the greater story, his story. And I want to assure you that God will not waste your struggle. God will not waste your pain. He will use it for good. Have you ever thought about the fact that maybe at some point, your story will be written down for others to read and strengthen their faith? Do you think that Mary and Joseph thought that their story was going to be recorded? And here we would be sitting 2000 years later, reading about their journey to Bethlehem. What about your story? What about your life?

Who is going to be encouraged by your faithfulness? It is true that your story, whatever you're going through right now might end in a miracle, but it might end in heartbreak. But the truth is, God uses them both. We have a chapter in scripture in the book of Hebrews that we call the faith chapter. And I want to read a little bit of that to you. Hebrews chapter 11:32, the author says, and what more shall I say?

I do not have time to talk about Gideon or Barack or Samson or Jeff ta about David and Samuel in the prophets. Who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice and gained what was promised, who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames and escaped the edge of the sword. Whose weakness was turned to strength and who became powerful and battle and routed foreign enemies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again.

There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning. They were sawed in two. They were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goat

skins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated. But the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains living in caves and in holes in the ground.

And I love this section of Hebrews chapter 11, because I doubt that any of these men and women knew that their stories were going to be written down and included in scripture. For us all to read, and included in these stories, if you have, in your mind, some of the memories from Sunday school class or previous sermons, you have stories of all shapes and sizes all the way back to shadrach, meshach, and a bendigo that are dancing in the fire, and they're faithfulness to God, and God's protected them by a miracle.

He saved their lives so that God could receive the glory, but then we also have a story of Steven, who is stoned to death because of his faith. This author talks about people that are sought in two or stoned or flogged. You see, some were saved, but others gave their lives. And God uses both stories. And we don't have the answers, but their faithfulness is shared for generation after generation, and so today we come with our story.

Every single one of us has struggles and ups and downs and twists and turns that were unexpected. And yet today, we come to worship our unexpected messiah, because his story changed everything. And so I want to encourage you, don't be scared, don't give up. Keep fighting the good fight, whatever it is you're experiencing this Christmas. Put your faith in Jesus, put your trust in him, learn to endure whatever it is you are experiencing.

Because it is true, what doesn't kill us makes us stronger. And so we endure in faith, God promises to walk with us. As difficult as it is, allow God to write your story. I can promise you that your story will not go the way you think. I don't know one person that I've ever met or talked to when I asked them what's your story and they go back and they share everything. They go, yup, it's just how I drew it up when I was young. It's just how I planned it. That's never the case.

God has a plan for our story. And you can either go with it, or you can fight the whole way. But I encourage you. Recognize we can't see the whole picture. We can't see what God is doing. Always, in the world around us, but we need to keep moving forward in faith. Let me close in prayer. God, thank you for walking with us. Again, as always, I know that there are people here.

There's people watching online, listening on the radio, that right now are just going through such a difficult situation. And today, being Christmas has just made it even harder. Because maybe in their mind, they drew up what this day was going to look like. When they get older, when they had kids, when whatever it is. And that dream has just been smashed. God, I pray that you would give them peace and comfort and hope, and you would give them endurance.

To take it one day at a time, walking in faith, knowing that God, you will use their story to impact others as well. And that you have a plan that is greater than we could ever imagine. So help us to put our trust in you. We asked us in Jesus name. Amen.