onechurch

bigIdea

Many of us think of a God who is someone like Martha Stewart— someone who wouldn't dare enter our condemned, messy house. God could and would never use us because we're just too messy. We're a mess. And we think that God could never use us until we clean up our messy lives.

What we learn from Christmas is that God does His best work in the middle of a mess. Born in a urine soaked, smelly barn and wrapped up in rags in a feeding trough for animals. Nobody went through the barn and scoured it with *Softscrub* ahead of time. Yet the King of the universe—the Alpha and the Omega—enters into human history in a little bundle, wrapped in obscurity and poverty and humility, because that is God's signature.

BIG IDEA: God is with us in the messiest of places.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What Kind of Christmas Traditions Did You Have Growing Up?
2. Does Christmas time bring out the best or the worst in you? Your family?
3. Answer the question Chris asked this morning: What if you came home from church and found a camera crew and Martha Stewart waiting at your front door. What would you be feeling? Would you be ready to welcome her in? Would you leave her out in the cold? How do you feel what she would think of your house (clean or dirty, well-decorated or not?)
4. *How we view God changes our view of everything else*. What are some of the consequences of thinking of God like Martha Stewart?
5. *Read Matthew 2:1-18 and Luke 2:1-20*. In what ways have we romanticized the birth of Jesus? What have we added? What have we taken away?

   God goes to those who have time to hear him—so on that cloudless night 2,000 years ago, he went to simple shepherds.

6. If Jesus had been born in our time, to what group do you think the angels would have made this announcement?
7. *Read Luke 2:8-20*. How did the shepherds respond to the angelic announcement? Why do you think God chose them to receive the good news?
8. What sign did the angels tell the shepherds how they would find Jesus? Was this sign miraculous or ordinary? How do we miss God in the ordinary of our lives?
9. How would you expect a King to come into the world?
10. When you think about nativity sets, what pieces are included? How does Joseph look? How does Mary look? What about Jesus?

    Whenever you see a nativity scene in somebody's home or in a shopping center, it always looks so neat. People in the nativity scene look like they just got out of the shower and sprayed their hair. Their robes look all ironed and everything. But in the actual barn where Jesus was born, it wasn't that way. Because a barn's a messy place. If someone were to chance upon one of the caves used as sheep stable on the outskirts of Bethlehem, they wouldn't be impressed. The stable stinks like all stables do. The stench of urine, dung, and sheep reeks pungently in the air. The ground is hard, the hay scarce. Cobwebs cling to the ceiling of this cave and a mouse scurries across the dirt floor. A more lowly or messy place for a birth could not exist.

11. What would you expect to see in a stable? What would you expect to hear? What would you expect to smell?
12. That Jesus came into such a messy context for His birth, what does that tell you about Jesus?
13. What do you say to the person that says, "I've got to get my life cleaned up first. Right now, I'm got a mess and I have to do some moral improvement job first. Then I can come to God."

THINK ABOUT IT

Here is the good news about Jesus. He really doesn't care how messy your life is. Your mess doesn't scare him at all. *He isn't like Martha Stewart—all prim and proper*. He started his earthly life in a mess, dressed in rags, laid in a manger and he ended his life in a mess wrapped in rags and hung on a cross. And in between the first day and the last day, he mostly just hung out with some pretty messed up people. The one thing that Christmas teaches us is that there is no place he won't go, because there's no thing he won't do, because there are no depths he will not descend in order to bring God's power and God's love and God's grace and God's peace and God's goodness and his presence to anybody who will have him.

CHANGING YOUR MIND

The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish. John 1:14