

# WHAT CHRISTMAS REVEALS ABOUT GOD

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Luke 1; 2:26-39; 8-12

CHRISTMAS SERIES: WHAT CHRISTMAS REVEALS ABOUT GOD

SERMON TITLE: "WHAT CHRISTMAS REVEALS ABOUT GOD'S SURPRISING WAYS"

SCRIPTURE TEXT: MATTHEW 1, LUKE 2 / P.

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## INTRO.

-- In some ways it's unfortunate that the Christmas story is so familiar to many of us. Familiarity keeps us from experiencing some of the important aspects of the story. Familiarity robs us of much of the wonder and keeps us from seeing much of its surprises.

The reality is that the Christmas story reveals to us that the God of the Bible (the only God who exists) is a God of surprises. Today, we're going to look at some of the surprises about God that are revealed to us in the Christmas story.

## I. GOD CHOOSES SURPRISING PEOPLE

-- One thing that we see about God in the Christmas story is that He chooses surprising people.

-- In the movie *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* the Grinch (played by Jim Carrey) is a curmudgeonly beast who lives on top of a mountain of garbage overlooking Whoville. What he sees disgusts him. The people of Whoville (called Whos) love Christmas but the Grinch detests it and the Whos. The Whos, are both repulsed by and fear the Grinch. When the Whos gather for the annual Christmas Whobulation, the mayor, invites nominations for the Holiday Cheer Meister, a coveted award usually given to the mayor. But a sweet little Who girl named Cindy Lou, who feels sympathy for the Grinch and believes he has been misunderstood, has a surprise for the townspeople.

Scene from *The Grinch* (33:41-36:40)

### A. THE PEOPLE GOD CHOSE (MATTHEW 1)

-- Cindy Lou's choice of the Grinch was surprising, but no more so than the people God chooses to use in the Christmas story. Take, for example, some of the ancestors listed in Jesus' genealogy in Matthew 1.

#### 1. The Ancestors (Matt. 1:1-17)

-- Hebrew genealogies were traced through men (e.g., "A" was the father of "B" and "B" was the father of "C" and "C" was the father of "D"&hellip;). And that's the basic format in the genealogy given by Matthew in the opening verses of his Gospel. But as you read the genealogy, you find 4 surprising entries - 4 women. Matthew doesn't have to mention any of these women, but he goes out of his way to include them. Finding these women mentioned here is surprising not just because they are women but because they are women with baggage.

##### a. Tamar (v. 3a)

-- Tamar was the daughter-in-law of Judah (one of Jacob's 12 sons). She was married to Judah's son Er. Tamar wasn't a Jew; she was a Canaanite. Because of Er's wickedness, God struck him dead before he and Tamar had any children. The practice at that time was that if a man died before having any children then the man's brother was to father a child by the widow so the dead man's line could continue. Judah promised Tamar that he would have his son Shelab father a child with her when Shelab grew up into manhood. Several years went by and when Tamar realized that Judah had no intention of having Shelab father a child with her, Tamar took things in her own hands. She learned that Judah was going on a trip and disguised herself as a prostitute and sat along the road Judah was traveling. Her deception worked, and Judah had sex with her, and she became pregnant with twin sons, one of whom was the Perez named in Matthew's genealogy.

##### b. Rahab (5a)

-- The second woman mentioned in the genealogy is Rahab.

v. 5a

-- You might remember that we saw Rahab listed among the great heroes of faith in Hebrews 11.

The reason it was surprising to find her mentioned there is the same reason it's surprising to find her mentioned here. Do you remember why it was surprising to find her there? She was a prostitute. Remember, like Tamar, Rahab wasn't a Jew. She was a Canaanite living in the city of Jericho and hid the spies that Joshua had sent into the city and helped them to escape because she had come to believe in the God of Israel, and because of that faith God delivered her and her family when the city was destroyed. Moreover, Rahab became the mother of Boaz, the great-grandfather of David.

c. Ruth (5b)

-- The next woman mentioned by Matthew is Ruth, the wife of Boaz. Like Tamar and Rahab, Ruth wasn't a Jew. She was a Gentile, a Moabite, a people who were under the condemnation of God, but God chose her to become the great-grandmother of David.

d. Bathsheba (6b)

-- The final woman isn't actually identified by name.  
v. 6b

-- All of us probably remember the story of how King David committed adultery with Bathsheba and then to cover up her pregnancy had her husband Uriah sent to the battlefield to be killed. The first baby born to David and Bathsheba died, but God gave them another child, a son named Solomon.

2. The Parents (Matt. 1: 18a)

-- Not only did God make some surprising choices among Jesus' ancestors; God also made a surprising choice when it came to Jesus' earthly parents.

v. 18a

-- The surprising thing about Mary and Joseph is how common, ordinary and unremarkable they were. They were what we'd call the "working poor." They were good people, but they had little in terms of education or possessions, and they had no status, power or influence outside of their own families. They lived in Galilee, the boondocks of Israel. Being a Galilean was like being born and raised in West Virginia - you were considered a hick. And not only were they from Galilee, they resided in Nazareth - a lowbrow town in a lowbrow territory. When Philip told Nathaniel that he had met Messiah - Jesus of Nazareth, Nathaniel replied, "can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Only God would have chosen someone like Mary and Joseph for the most important parenting assignment in human history.

## B. THE OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE PEOPLE GOD CHOSE

-- Examining God's choices in Jesus' ancestors and earthly parents leads to 3 observations about the God's surprising people God chooses.

1. God Chooses on the Basis of His Grace Not Our Merit.

-- We see that clearly demonstrated in the women listed in Matthew's genealogy:

Tamar was a Gentile who tricked father-in-law into incest.

Rahab was a Gentile prostitute.

Ruth was a Moabite - a member of a pagan nation under God's curse.

-- None of these deserved in any way to be numbered among the ancestors of the Messiah, but God graciously chose them for that special honor.

2. God Chooses People on Basis of Character More Than Circumstances.

-- Your circumstances can never thwart the movement of God in your life. God is always greater than your circumstances.

-- Why did God choose Mary and Joseph to be the earthly parents of the Son of God? Certainly not because of their circumstances - they were very ordinary people with meager means. The Bible seems to indicate that God chose them more in light of their character.

For example, what the Bible says about Joseph in Matthew 1:18-19.

Cf., Matt. 1:18-19

-- We see something about Joseph's character here: he was both righteous and compassionate. He was deeply troubled when he thought that Mary had been unfaithful, but he didn't want to humiliate her publicly.

Joseph was a man of meager circumstances but strong character. If you want God to use you, don't worry about your circumstances; focus on developing godly character.

### 3. God Chooses People on Basis of Their Availability More Than Capability.

-- Do you think that Mary was the most brilliant or talented woman in Israel? Probably not. But she was a woman who was ready and willing to make herself fully available to God.

Cf., Luke 1:26-38 (p. 723)

The Message renders Mary's response to God this way: "I'm the Lord's maid, ready to serve."

## II. GOD WORKS IN SURPRISING WAYS.

-- The Christmas story reveals to us that God chooses surprising people, and it also shows us that God works in surprising ways. You can't put God in a box. As soon as you think you've got Him figured out and know exactly what He's going to do, He will do something to surprise you.

### A. GOD DOES SURPRISING THINGS.

-- The Christmas story shows us that God does surprising things - like announce the birth of the long awaited Messiah to a bunch of shepherds.

-- Think for a minute - who would have been the most likely candidates for God to inform about the birth of His Son?

Certainly, we would expect it to be someone with prominent religious standing, someone like a priest or rabbi. But God doesn't send the angels to them. Instead, God makes the announcement to shepherds. To get an idea of what that was like, consider that if Jesus were born today, instead of announcing the birth to a mega-church pastor or to a seminary faculty, God would send the angels to some overnight security guards at a warehouse.

### B. GOD SHOWS UP IN SURPRISING PLACES.

-- God does surprising things, and He also shows up in surprising places. Like a stable in Bethlehem.

-- The first-century Bible scholars expected the Messiah to be born in Bethlehem, because that's what the OT prophet Micah had foretold. But they certainly never expected to find the Messiah in a stable manger. They expected Him to be a great king and a powerful military leader. In fact, that's a major reason the religious leaders never accepted Christ, because He didn't fit the profile of their expectations.

-- That should serve as a caution to all of us - God doesn't adjust to our expectations - we adjust to His - and that may take us in some surprising directions.

-- God declares in Isaiah:

Isaiah 55:8 (NLT) "My thoughts are not like your thoughts," says the LORD. "And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine."

## III. GOD DID ALL THIS FOR A SURPRISING REASON - HIS LOVE FOR UNWORTHY SINNERS.

-- But the most surprising thing of all in the Christmas story is the reason for Christmas itself - the reason God sent His Son and the reason Christ was born and took on human form. The reason is stated in one of the most familiar verses in the Bible:

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

-- As I said at the beginning, the problem with familiarity of this verse is that it keeps us from seeing the surprise in it. The surprise is the great way God loves "the world." The word used here is the Greek term kosmos, which refers to the world of fallen humanity that is in rebellion against God and living in willful disobedience against Him. The surprising thing is that God would even love a world like this, alone love it enough to give His only Son to die for it.

## CONCLUSION

I want to close with a passage from a book by D.A. Carson entitled The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God: Picture Charles and Susan walking down a beach hand in hand at the end of the academic year. The pressure of the semester has dissipated in the warm evening breeze. They have kicked off their sandals, and the wet sand squishes between their toes. Charles turns to Susan, gazes deeply into her large, hazel eyes, and says, "Susan, I love you. I really do."

What does he mean?

Well, in this day and age he may mean nothing more than that he feels like testosterone on legs and wants to go to bed with her forthwith. But if we assume he has even a modicum of decency, let alone Christian virtue, the least he means is something like this: "Susan, you mean everything to me. I can't live without you. Your smile poleaxes me from 50 yards. Your sparkling good humor, your beautiful eyes, the scent of your hair - everything about you transfixes me. I love you!"

What he most certainly does not mean is something like this: "Susan, quite frankly you have such a bad case of halitosis it would embarrass a herd of unwashed, garlic-eating elephants. Your nose is so bulbous you

belong in the cartoons. Your hair is so greasy it could lubricate an eighteen-wheeler. Your knees are so disjointed you make a camel look elegant. Your personality makes Attila the Hun and Genghis Khan look like wimps. But I love you!"

So now God comes to us and says, "I love you." What does he mean?

Does he mean something like this? "You mean everything to me. I can't live without you. Your personality, your witty conversation, your beauty, your smile - everything about you transfixes me. Heaven would be boring without you. I love you!" That, after all, is pretty close to what some therapeutic approaches to the love of God spell out. We must be pretty wonderful because God loves us. And dear old God is pretty vulnerable, finding himself in a dreadful state unless we say yes&hellip;.

When he says he loves us, does not God rather mean something like the following? "Morally speaking, you are the people of the halitosis, the bulbous nose, the greasy hair, the disjointed knees, the abominable personality. Your sins have made you disgustingly ugly. But I love you anyway, not because you are attractive, but because it is my nature to love."

That's the surprising thing about the Christmas story - the thing that we must not let the story's familiarity ever diminish - that the great and holy God loves unholy sinners like us.