

Series: **Christmas Eve 2020**

CDOBC – beginning on 12/24/20

Today's Title: "**Adversity**"

*December 24, 2020 - Matthew 1:19-23*

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**OBJECTIVE:** To help people learn that adversity is part of the Christmas message.

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Adversity.

That pretty much sums up 2020.

A year full of adversity.

I'm glad to finish 2020 with Christmas – and then New Years – bright celebrations in an otherwise dark year.

We often associate Christmas with feelings of joy – good cheer – ‘making merry’ – celebrations – laughter – love – and for good reason!

All of these are fitting for Christmas celebrations as they all reflect the goodness and joy of God expressed in His incarnation – God becoming flesh!

But there is another side to the Christmas story – **adversity**.

The Christmas account in the Gospels is full of adversity.

Adversity at every turn.

So, I thought it would be fitting – on Christmas Eve 2020 – to take a few minutes and look at the adversity of that first Christmas – not just for the sake of historical accuracy, but for our encouragement.

- We need to know that God is bigger than any adversity.

- We need to know the truth that God has always used adversity to further His plan of redemption.
- We need to know that in a year of unprecedented adversity and pain – God is still working – and His plan will not be derailed. ***His blessing often comes in the midst of adversity!***

Tonight, I want to look at 3 different people who experienced a tremendous amount of adversity that first Christmas.

### **Joseph & Mary**

The holy couple faced an incredible amount of adversity – and much of it likely from their own family and friends.

The birth account of Jesus opens by telling us Joseph and Mary were “betrothed”.

Betrothal in the 1<sup>st</sup> century was a pre-marriage status – but it had the legal ties of marriage.

Divorce was needed to break off a betrothal.

During this time the couple was not sexually involved with each other – the consummation of the union would take place at the time of the wedding.

So, when Mary turns up pregnant – while she was betrothed to Joseph – it didn’t look good.

The obvious conclusion people would make was either she and Joseph sinned by having sex before their wedding – or Mary had cheated on Joseph.

This is what Joseph thought – and why we read in:

**Matthew 1:19**

“Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.”

Joseph wasn't buying Mary's story about an angel and the Holy Spirit – the Son of God.

However, in the next verse, we're told:

an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

She will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” – Matthew 1:20-21

This no doubt created quite the gossip in the small town of Nazareth – which is likely why Mary decided to leave town for the next 6 months and stay with her aunt Elizabeth and Uncle Zechariah.

Not only was the conception of Jesus full of adversity, so was His birth.

- No room at the inn in Bethlehem
- Strangers: First, (shepherds) visiting when Jesus was born
- Later, Magi visited from the east

After the Magi's visit, Joseph, Mary and their baby boy had to run for their lives under the cover of darkness as King Herod was out to destroy this new baby declared to be the eventual King of the Jews!

Most scholars believe that Joseph died sometime before Jesus turned 30.

The scandal of Mary's pregnancy never left them...more on this later.

**King Herod** (*negative example*)

As Joseph and Mary are a positive example for us of how to handle adversity – how to say 'yes' to God even though saying 'yes' leads to great adversity in life.

Herod is the negative example.

There are a lot of Herod's out there today.

Those who not only reject the claims of Jesus – the claims of Christmas – but they get angry – hostile toward those who are Christ-followers.

King Herod couldn't stand the thought of a baby being born and people thinking this baby would someday be king!

So, his response was trickery – followed by mass murder.

**Matthew 2** records one of the most brutal and evil acts in history – the murder of the innocents in Bethlehem.

Herod had the chance to embrace this baby – whom others declared to be a future king.

Even his own advisors informed him of the prophecy in **Micah** (**Matthew 2:4-6**) – that a king would come from

Bethlehem – a king that would be a “...ruler who will shepherd My people Israel.” (Matt. 2:6, quoting Micah 5:2)

Instead of realizing the birth of this baby boy might be part of God’s plan – Herod chose to fight against God’s plan – to resist it – to protect and further his own power and influence.

Herod may be unusual in his level of evil (his murder of Bethlehem’s innocents), but there are many people today who respond to Jesus in similar ways to Herod.

They see Jesus as a threat...

- A threat to their way of life
- A threat to their reputation
- A threat to their happiness
- A threat to their stability
- A threat to their intellect

So, they reject Jesus – to protect themselves and the perceived threat Jesus brings.

They may even do this politely – as Herod did in the beginning – playing along – yet never intending to worship Jesus.

**Following Jesus often leads to adversity.**

It was true then...it’s still true today.

The reason we can triumph through adversity is by reminding yourself that God is bigger than the adversity.

Adversity in life doesn't limit God's love and grace in life.

In that first Christmas, when God became flesh, His actions *caused* the adversity.

When God was at work doing His most loving and amazing work with the human race, it disrupted human lives.

Often, when God begins to work in your life, it will lead to adversity – points of decision – crossroads which require a clear decision on your part.

- Will you obey God – or obey your own will?
- Will you protect your way of life – or submit to Jesus' way of life?

These always produce adverse conditions.

***Holiness produces fallout with those who don't support holiness!***

**Matthew 1:21-23**

“She will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).”

These verses are some of the most beautiful and amazing verses in all the Scriptures – and they are also some of the most disruptive verses to those involved. Joseph and Mary's life would never be the same.

For the rest of her life Mary would have a reputation of adulteress.

Joseph would have the reputation of a weak man who was unable to stand up to his disgraceful wife.

Their families would likely reject them.

Jesus was labeled as a bastard – even 30 years later!

**John 8:41** – *The Message*

They said, “We’re not bastards. We have a legitimate father...”

There is a price to pay when you follow Jesus – but what you gain is worth the price.

In **Mark 8:36-37** Jesus said:

“And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?”

What you gain makes the price insignificant.

But it doesn’t feel insignificant.

However, Jesus promised:

“Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for My sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.”

**Mark 10:29-30**

The Apostle Paul expands on this in **Ephesians 3:20**

“to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us...”

**Romans 8:18**

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

**1 Peter 1:4**

Believers in Christ have “an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you...”

What you gain in Christ is unsurpassed by anything you give up in this life.

How about you?

Are you more like Joseph and Mary – willing to obey Jesus – to follow Him – even if it brings adversity to your life?

Or are you more like Herod – unwilling to obey and follow Jesus – because He will bring adversity and change to your life – and you’re unwilling to give up what you have – to receive what Jesus wants to give you?

I pray you will be like Joseph and Mary – like the shepherds who went to see the baby – and left rejoicing, telling others about this amazing child!

Closing prayer / salvation