

12-18-2010, COTR Texarkana

Title: Hope on a Dark Night

Purpose: Help people find hope in life's darkest moments.

Spiritual Truth: God can bring the light of His Presence into life's darkest moments.

Text: Lu 2:1-7

Topic: Christmas, Hope, Darkness, Light

Hope on a Dark Night

I. Introduction

A. Video: Charlie Brown Christmas

1. Baby Jesus can get lost around Santa and the presents. Linus is pretty smart.

B. Jokes:

1. Church member gift dilemma
2. Readers Digest letters to Santa

C. Luke 2:1-7 (NCV)

¹ At that time, Augustus Caesar sent an order that all people in the countries under Roman rule must list their names in a register... ³ And all went to their own towns to be registered.

1. The purpose of the census was for taxation. What seemed to be a dictate of someone in political power was used by God to orchestrate His plan to fulfill a 700 year old prophecy where Christ would be born.
2. This Roman emperor was the most powerful man in the most powerful government on earth at the time yet he was a pawn on God's chessboard.

D. Verse 4... So Joseph left Nazareth, a town in Galilee, and went to the town of Bethlehem in Judea, known as the town of David... Joseph registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was now pregnant. ⁶ While they were in Bethlehem, the time came for Mary to have the baby, ⁷ and she gave birth to her first son. Because **there were no rooms left in the inn**, she wrapped the baby with pieces of cloth and laid him in a feeding trough.

1. Up to this point supernatural events preceded the birth of Christ, i.e. the Immaculate Conception, dreams from God. Now God seems strangely absent.
2. The manger was a barn for animals. The Son of God spent his 1st night in an animal feeding trough. The nursery smelled of hay and manure. The birth of Jesus shows us that God elevates the lowly and humble and rejects the proud and mighty of this world.
 - a. It was quite different from our "Home for Christmas" theme on stage.

E. Let's try to recreate the scene when Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem. *Remove shepherd and wise men. Stage lights go from dim to dark.*

1. Imagine what Mary and Joseph must have been feeling. She is 9 months pregnant and contractions may have begun. She had been riding on a donkey on an 85-90 mile journey. They had nowhere to stay and Mary was ready to give birth. It was dark outside but the same God who led them this far was about to send His light into their dark circumstances.

2. Mary and Joseph show us how people who follow God find hope on a dark night.

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G. Purpose: Help people find hope in life's darkest moments.

H. Spiritual Truth: God can bring the light of His Presence into life's darkest moments.

II. Mary and Joseph experienced the light of God's Presence in a dark moment of their life. They show us that we can find hope through God in dark circumstances. Light is a symbol of God's Presence that gives hope, direction and comfort in times of trouble.

A. In the Bible light is a way of communicating spiritual truth. Light symbolizes what is good. Light is closely linked with God: **"The Lord will be your everlasting light"** (Is 60:19). The prophet Micah expressed his confidence in terms of light: "Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; **when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me ...He will bring me forth to the light**; I shall behold his deliverance" (Mi 7:8, 9).
Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible

B. Mary and Joseph may have felt all alone in the darkness of night. The truth is they weren't alone. God was with them in their darkest hour.

1. Imagine how they felt when the inn keeper left the two of them all alone. But in reality they were not alone. God was with them on the dark night. The same God is with us in our darkest moments.
 - a. Matthew 28:20 (NCV)
²⁰ **...I will be with you always, even until the end of this age.**
2. God was with Daniel in the lion's den...SMA in the fiery furnace... Joseph in the pit and in prison... Paul and Silas in prison... Stephen while being stoned
 - a. It can be dark on the outside while the light of God's Presence is shining on the inside. Sometimes you see it and feel it and sometimes you see it with the eye of faith. Either way it's real.
3. Haiti email re. political unrest: Imagine crowds of 1000's marching down the road and cannons of tear gas being shot outside your home. Money has stopped coming in, the school is closed, our Christmas play is cancelled and I may not be able to fly out for Christmas. Why me? Because God loves me so much...
4. Darkness can make us feel forgotten by God but the truth is you'll never be forgotten by God.
 - a. Isaiah 49:14-16 (NLT) [Context: God's care for his people]
¹⁴ Yet Jerusalem says, "The Lord has deserted us; the Lord has forgotten us." ¹⁵ **"Never!** Can a mother forget her nursing child? Can she feel no love for the child she has borne? But even if that were possible, **I would not forget you!** ¹⁶ See, I have written your name on the palms of my hands...

C. Mary and Joseph may have felt they had needs that were too big to be met. The truth is no need is too big for God.

1. Imagine how Joseph felt. Mary's asking, "Where are we going to stay"? She says I need to lie down. She may even have the grimace of a contraction. The inn's full and they have no place to go. Joseph doesn't know what to do. God came through. He did it for Joseph He can do it for you.

- a. You may be out of resources but God isn't. If we are following God's plan for our life Jesus has promised to take care of us.
- b. Matthew 6:33 (NLT)
³³ **Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.** (Context: food, clothing, shelter).
- c. Jesus was clear: Put God 1st, have faith and don't worry. This doesn't mean we won't struggle or do without. Godly people have financial pressure. Mary probably wanted a room at the Bethlehem Hilton but God still took care of them and they were content.
2. We must have faith until God's provision comes. Abraham taught us this.
 - a. Genesis 22:7-8 (ESV) [Context: sacrifice your son...a test of faith]
⁷ And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here am I, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" ⁸ Abraham said, "**God will provide** for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together.
 - b. Faith in God and His Word gives you hope to keep going.

D. Mary and Joseph may have felt like they were being controlled by people and ignored by God. The truth is followers of Christ have a divine hand guiding our lives.

1. They were being led by God's sovereign plan to a stable in Bethlehem that was predicted 700 years earlier.
2. Psalm 37:23 (NLT)
²³ **The Lord directs the steps of the godly. He delights in every detail of their lives.**
3. Like Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Pilate and Caesar Augustus were being used by God to bring about His purpose and plan.
4. Jesus' words to Pilate reveal this.
 - a. John 19:10-11 (NLT)
¹⁰ "Why don't you talk to me?" Pilate demanded. "Don't you realize that I have the power to release you or crucify you?" ¹¹ Jesus said, "**You would have no power over me at all unless it were given to you from above...**"
5. When you are born again God adopts you into his family and set in motion a divine plan for your life no man can stop.
 - a. Psalm 139:13-16 (NLT)
¹³ You ...knit me together in my mother's womb... ¹⁶ You saw me before I was born. **Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.**

III. Conclusion (Put the baby Jesus back in the manger. He grew up and assumed His role as Savior of the world)

A. John 8:12 (NCV)

¹² Jesus talked to the people again, saying, "**I am the light of the world. The person who follows me will never live in darkness but will have the light that gives life.**"

1. Not all people find light on their dark days. Bernie Madoff was imprisoned for running a \$50 billion ponzi scheme. Later his son committed suicide in the

darkness of it all. People die every day in despair because the darkness in their world that has crept into their heart. But some people face darkness differently. They go through divorce, file bankruptcy, lose lawsuits, go to jail but have a light shining in their heart. What's the difference? People who follow Jesus have the light of His Presence shining in their heart.

2. People often find a deeper relationship with God in life's darkest moments. Personal testimony crying at 19.

IV. Response

A. Prayer

- B. Souls:** Santa can bring toys and presents but there is something Santa can't give...the gift of eternal life. Only Jesus can offer this gift. Only Jesus can remove the darkness of sin and replace it with His marvelous light.