

Christmas Eve - 2023

Once again let me welcome you to City Hope Church. We are so honored that you have chosen to come and gather with us today.

Our desire is for you to walk out of here today having experienced God and not us.

We believe Jesus is the hope of the world and for the world.

I'm not here to preach at you or to pressure you into having a relationship with Jesus. He always gave people the choice to follow Him. My job today is to introduce some of you to Jesus...to tell you of His goodness...and let you decide if you want to follow Him or not.

My agenda today is that you would discover or re-discover the love story of Jesus.

Christmas is the beginning of the greatest love story ever told.

Throughout his life Jesus always represented what is good and kind.

Here is a lesson for us all. No one in this world, no matter how lowly, no matter what side of the tracks they come from, would find Jesus unrelatable. He is accessible to all.

I think it's wise for us to start at the end, to truly understand the beginning. Why that first Christmas? About 30 years later, Jesus Himself explained the whole reason He came: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

Jesus was born to die.

For the next few moments, I want us to look together at that first Christmas and see how God can still use it in our lives today.

We are going to look at the story from Luke's perspective. I've asked _____ to help us today by reading the story. Let's stand together in honor of the reading of Gods Word.

Luke 2.1-7 | In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole empire should be registered. ²This first registration took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. ³So everyone went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family line of David, ⁵to be registered along with Mary, who was engaged to him and was pregnant. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷Then she gave birth to her firstborn son, and she wrapped him tightly in cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

Pray

Joseph and Mary went to Joseph's hometown of Bethlehem to register for the census. We already know a little about this young couple. They are engaged to be married, but the marriage hasn't yet to be consummated.

They have heard from the Lord that she is carrying The Messiah. Being that Mary was still a virgin, this was a lot for everyone to take in. The reality is, it's still a lot for some people to take in.

It's not normal. A little hard to believe. With all of their emotions, doubts, and anxiety...Joseph and Mary head to Bethlehem.

Vs. 6 is where I want us to sit for a minute today. It says, ⁶ **While they were there, the time came for her to give birth.**

These four words jumped off the page to me this year. "While they were there..."

Mary and Joseph were in a place that wasn't their norm.

This wasn't according to their plan.

It's likely that Mary didn't dream of having her baby away from her homeland. Not only away from her home, but she didn't plan on having a baby in a stable.

This phrase, "While they were there"...tells of their geographical location, but it also represents the season of life of life they were in.

You see Joseph and Mary were in a season where it's very likely they had more questions than answers.

I wonder how many of us can truly relate to Joseph and Mary because we are in a season that we didn't expect to be in? Maybe you're here today.

We all have seasons we go through. Different seasons of life for different emotions and different responsibilities.

We can't always control the seasons, but we can control our response.

The Lord created different seasons in our lives to shape us, help us deal, and create us into who He intended us to be.

This is a really big deal for us to understand. Solomon was deemed the wisest man to ever live and these were his words on seasons.

Ecclesiastes 3.1-11 | 1 For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven. 2 A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant and a time to harvest. 3 A time to kill and a time to heal. A time to tear down and a time to build up. 4 A time to cry and a time to laugh. A time to grieve and a time to dance. 5 A time to scatter stones and a time to gather stones. A time to embrace and a time to turn away. 6 A time to search and a time to quit searching. A time to keep and a time to throw away. 7 A time to tear and a time to mend. A time to be quiet and a time to speak. 8 A time to love and a time to hate. A time for war and a time for peace. 9 What do people really get for all their hard work? 10 I have seen the burden God has placed on us all. 11 Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end. (ESV)

God uses our seasons to show us that He is good and can "make everything beautiful for its own time" (verse 11). Seasons (good and bad) are ways for God to capture our hearts and our faith.

Here is what we believe. **God will change the season of life when He's ready to change something about me.**

There are some more difficult seasons, but The Lord just wants me to trust Him through each & every season. No matter what kind of season I'm going through, I can remember and know that God always promises to make it beautiful in His time.

Friend, whether this season is filled with joy or pain, I pray that you can take heart and have hope in the story of Christmas. God loves you dearly. He did not take you to this season to leave you there with no hope.

I pray that "while you are there," – Your trust will increase.

"While they were there..." Joseph and Mary had some very difficult decisions to make.

Here is a hard truth about trusting God in all seasons...**Obedience doesn't always lead to easy.**

Not the most joyful thing to think about on Christmas Eve...but it's the Truth.

I prayed, read a Bible verse, went to church on Christmas, helped an old person.....so how come my life is still feeling crazy? How come I'm not feeling blessed?

I will do what you say, as long as I get what I want. This is called circumstantial obedience. It's more of a transaction than a relationship.

Illustration | Marriages built on a to-do list. As long as you do all these things, we can stay married.

I don't know how many of us are signing up for that.

My relationship with God is not based on His performance, it's based on His promises.

God promised that Mary would be the mother of the Son of God. He promised Mary she would be blessed. He promised that nothing would be impossible with God.

Even though they were in a season of unknowns, they trusted and obeyed.

Let's jump back into Joseph and Mary's story... ⁶ **While they were there, the time came for her to give birth.** ⁷ **Then she gave birth to her firstborn son, and she wrapped him tightly in cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.**

If this is me...Wait, you mean to tell me, I'm being obedient. I'm doing what you want from me and I can't even have my baby in a hospital? A bathtub, a bed, a couch....I have to have him in a stable?

How can I be blessed but going through this mess?

We have the privilege to read the rest of the story.

This was all part of God's plan...to show the humility of Jesus. The King deserved a palace but was born in a stable.

In God's master story...Joseph and Mary were important, but they weren't the main characters. Jesus was.

Illustration: Sissy talking about Christmas not making sense.

I think Joseph and Mary were scared and cautious and even had some doubt...but trust won out. They believed that God was going to do what He said He would...even in the seasons when they weren't confident, they trusted.

Paul even spoke to this. **Galatians 6.9 | Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.**

Remember, Joseph and Mary didn't know the whole story. You never really know the whole story. You gotta keep living and praying and seeking, believing, trusting. Keep swinging.

That's why you can't kill your kids...you don't know the whole story. They may grow up and buy you a house or something!! HAHA.

Conclusion:

As we close today, I want to look at one more part of this story to offer each of us a challenge.

Vs. 7 | Then she gave birth to her firstborn son, and she wrapped him tightly in cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

Right in Josephs hometown, not one person could help. No one had any room for Jesus.

I believe this is God's Word for somebody today...**Make room for something new.**

As you celebrate the greatest story ever told...As you walk into a brand-new year next week...make room for something new.

God wants to do something in and through you. Consider this your invitation to get involved in what He's doing.

He wants to reveal himself to you. He wants you to experience His goodness, and love, and mercy, and hope.

He wants to be the Lord over your life.

If you're looking at your life and you're tired of the same ol, same ol....make room for something new.

When we obey, we come to know God on a new level.

It's time to make room for something new this Christmas.

Response:

I want to ask you to do me a favor. Would you grab your candle and then bow your heads and close your eyes with me?

What is something in your life that you need to remove so that you can make room for new?

Is there a sin, a struggle, a relationship, a mindset, an unhealthy habit that has become comfortable? Sometimes we don't like new things because we are comfortable with the old.

Would you be bold enough to pray and ask God to reveal anything in your life that needs to be removed so that you can experience something new?

I believe that in Christ we can have a new life. He can change the direction of your journey by surrendering to His plans, just like Joseph and Mary.

I want to give you an opportunity to respond to God speaking today.

How many of you would say, I'm ready for something new! I'm going to make room in my life for something new this year. If that's you, would you raise your hand?

We want to help you and walk with you in this journey. The way to be sure you're on the right track is through a personal relationship with Jesus.

That is step one in all of our lives. Here is how I would like to end today.

If you are here today and you have already taken that pivotal step of giving Jesus your heart and making Him Lord over your life....I want to ask you to turn on your candle and raise it up.

For those of you listening who could not turn your candle on...The new that you need in your life is a personal relationship with Jesus.

Salvation / To be made whole, or to be saved, is to submit to God and His plan and purpose for our lives. It is a turning from our old ways and turning to Jesus, to ask Him for forgiveness from our sins and to give us new life in Him.

Romans 10:9 says: *"If you declare with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."*

Salvation is God's free gift to us, and we become His children.

It is an irrevocable acceptance into the family of God and it is an empowerment to live life wholly and fully with the purpose of reflecting God to the rest of His creation.

If you are not sure whether you are right with God or you know in fact that you need Jesus in your life, you can choose to follow Him right now by praying a prayer of surrender to Jesus.

**Dear Jesus, I'm praying this prayer because I know that I have done wrong by living without You. I am sorry and I trust that You will forgive me. I recognize your death burial and resurrection as the payment for my sins. I accept Your love and grace for me and ask that You would be my Lord. Help me believe in You and love You every day and help me to show the world what You are like and how great Your love is. Make me new, today!
In Jesus' name, amen.**