

The story begins in HUMILITY. It's a humble night... in an out of the way town. A young family, poor and in UNCOMMON CIRCUMSTANCE; traveling at the beck and call of a political decree.

Caesar, the great and mighty Emperor of Rome, utters a royal edict that pushes everyone to their ancestral towns; so he can levy his OPPRESSIVE TAXES on the COMMON FOLK.

Caesar was at work, but so was God.

Joseph and his uncomfortably pregnant wife make the 90-mile journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem - the city Micah wrote about in Micah 5:2.

“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler of Israel, whose origin is from old, from ancient of days... AND he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord.” [Micah 5:2]

Out of Bethlehem the King will come!

Out of a small and overlooked town a king is to be born!

A HUMBLE KING FROM A HUMBLE CITY.

After their long journey, they come to the town where their family is gathered from all over. Typically, they would stay in the family home on the family land; but for one reason or another, the family has no room for them. Perhaps Joseph just didn't have enough clout in his own family, or maybe the family was ashamed of their questionable circumstance. Perhaps not everyone was so quick to BELIEVE THEIR UNBELIEVABLE STORY.

With no place to stay, the young family finally finds shelter in a stable behind the INN. In the musty barn the SAVIOR of the WORLD would be born.

To some it may sound surprising that God would come to earth in such a humble way. BUT, we know our God often works in the shadows - unnoticed and overlooked. It how he likes to work. He'd have it no other way.

Enter the shepherds - also unnoticed and overlooked. They were the most lowly of characters – nobodies, living on the margins of society. BUT God values the humble and loves shepherds - these caretakers, watching over helpless animals. Day and night tending, caring and protecting their flock.

This is not the first time we have a story of a king and shepherd in Bethlehem. Remember David? He too was UNNOTICED and OVERLOOKED. Samuel the priest had come to anoint one of Jesse's

boys from Bethlehem to be king. BUT Samuel almost missed him for his older, better looking brother.

But God intervened saying... ***“Do not look at appearance or height... for God sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance but the LORD looks at the heart.”***

[1 Samuel 16:7]

God directs Samuel’s gaze to little David out tending the sheep - the UNNOTICED and OVERLOOKED shepherd boy. God will use that shepherd boy to defeat a giant, to defend and protect Israel. God will use his humble beginnings as a shepherd boy prepared him to become Israel’s greatest king.

God loves shepherds - the out of way characters who take care of others.

Remember the words of Micah: ***“Out of Bethlehem will come a ruler... who will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord.”***

Once again, God is calling a shepherd king out of Bethlehem to be his great ruler; only this time this ruler will be a Savior - the Messiah; God become flesh.

I find it fitting that when God’s son is born, only the shepherds are told – not the rulers, not the politicians, not the financiers, not the CEO’s or religious elite. Only the UNNOTICED and OVERLOOKED; only the hard at work in the fields; ONLY THESE HUMBLE SHEPHERDS.

This Christmas, the challenge here at Northglenn has been to re-think how we celebrate Christmas. I believe that Christmas can still change the world.

We’ve been challenged to **WORSHIP FULLY**. Christmas is about celebrating the God who comes to be with us, the God who enters into our story, the God who is close and loves us. If God comes to be with us, we ought to be with him. We ought to worship him fully.

This Christmas we’ve been challenged to **SPEND LESS** on meaningless gifts that will soon be forgotten. The challenge was not to stop giving gifts, BUT to give intentionally. The challenge is to remember that God gave us his Son as the ULTIMATE GIFT TO HUMANITY; so, we ought to also give the SON and give of ourselves. These are gifts that cost us nothing, yet cost us everything. Remember - whoever gets the Son, gets it all

We’ve been challenged to **GIVE MORE**. Again, at Christmas we celebrate the God who has come to be with us. The challenge was to celebrate by giving more of our TIME and PRESENCE to

others. Christmas is less about presents and more our presence. God is with us, let's be with each other.

This week our final challenge is to **LOVE ALL**. The original story of Christmas is a DEEPLY SUBVERSIVE STORY about a young family NAVIGATING POLITICAL POLICIES and REJECTION. It is about people on the edge of society in OVERLOOKED towns and UNNOTICED places. The invitation is to scratch beneath the surface and see what God is doing in the shadows. God loves to work in the margins with the overlooked and unnoticed.

I believe that God comes to us IN OUR OBSCURITY, when we didn't deserve his generous gift of love and life.

Paul says it this way... ***"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*** [Romans 5:8]

John says it this way... ***"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. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."*** [John 3:16-17]

Later John would write... ***⁹This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*** [1 John 4:9-11]

The story of Christmas is the story of a God who loves, a God who comes to our rescue, a God who saves and gives life. God loves all. We ought to love.

Just before Jesus dies on a cross - paying the penalty of our sin so that we don't have to - he gave us some instructions for how we ought to live – how we ought to live for what really matters.

They are recorded in Matthew 25.

He sums them up like this... "WHATEVER YOU DO FOR THE LEAST OF THESE BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF MINE... YOU DO FOR ME.

IN THE SAME WAY... WHATEVER YOU DO NOT DO FOR THE LEAST OF THESE BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF MINE... YOU DID NOT DO FOR ME."

Jesus says, what matters is how we love others - how we treat the least of these. All around us, in our families and neighborhoods and workplaces, are PEOPLE WHO NEED TO KNOW THE LOVE GOD HAS FOR THEM. THEY NEED TO KNOW THE LOVE OF A GOD WHO WOULD DIE FOR THEM. BUT, far too often they go OVERLOOKED and UNNOTICED.

The call is the LOVE ALL. The call is to go to the margins - WHERE JESUS SPENT SO MUCH OF HIS TIME HERE ON EARTH - AND LOOK FOR THE FORGOTTEN, look for the unloved, look for the rejected and hurt. The call share with them the love that we've experienced in Christ.

CHRISTMAS IS MERRY! Not because of the songs we sing or the spirit in the air or the gifts we get and give. Christmas is merry because God came to be with us; to save us, to die for us so that we can spend eternity with him.

We invite you, this Christmas, to celebrate the God who came to save by loving others and coming to their rescue with the story of hope.

I believe Christmas can still save the world. May we be a church that loves others like God loves us.

Merry Christmas!