

The Word Became Flesh (Advent Series)

IV. God Saves

12/21/2008

1. This final segment in the Advent study speaks of salvation, of God providing a savior for mankind. How did Pastor Steve define salvation and where does the Luke 1:51-53 passage fit in?

A sudden reversal of fortune; your luck has changed. The Luke 1 passage describes a time when the proud are scattered, the rulers are brought down, and the humble are exalted. The world is stood on its head. In our case, we are destined for death, but given a gift of eternal life.

2. Read Luke 7:48-50 and describe what this salvation looks like.

The woman with the alabaster vial was “saved” on the spot. There were no membership classes, nor even a baptism. Is it possible that we are looking for something more complex, more extraordinary, more spiritual, when God is simply looking for a change of heart?

3. Micah 5 is full of prophecies that point toward a Messiah. Read just Micah 5:2 and see how many significant prophecies you can pick out.

- Bethlehem (“House of Bread”) Ephrathah (“Fruitful”), which is the Birthplace of King David is also going to be the birthplace of the Messiah. (foresees bread and wine connection with Jesus)
- A ruler over Israel will come from this place
- This ruler will take the throne “for me” – he will rule on behalf of God
- This ruler has existed for all time (existed before the world was created)

4. Micah 5:3 then predicts the form in which this Messiah will come. What does it say?

This ruler will come as a baby.

5. Micah 5:4-5 then describes some imagery that probably relates more to the second coming of the Messiah than the first, but clearly states the purpose of the Messiah coming, which is . . . ?

To bring peace. This kind of peace is described in John 14:27.

6. We come now to the most popular Bible passage of all at Christmas time – Luke 2. Read the first five verses and reflect on the setting. Who thinks they are in charge in this passage be aren’t; who is really in control?

Caesar Augustus and all of the Roman government think they have a good grip on things, but the order for everyone to go back to the home of their ancestors simply makes sure that the baby Mary and Joseph were about to have ends up being born in Bethlehem (where Micah told us it was supposed to happen) rather than in Nazareth, which is where Mary and Joseph were residing. God used a nonbeliever to accomplish His will. This happened many times in the Bible (such as when Pharaoh ultimately funded the establishment of the Promised Land by giving the departing Israelites gold, silver, animals, and pretty much anything else they could carry away – see Exodus 12).

7. How does Luke 2:6-7 describe the birth of the new king?

Jesus is born in an animal shelter and laid in a manger, which is most likely means he was born in a cave in which a feeding trough had been hewn into a wall. Bethlehem is packed with people coming to comply with the census, so the animal population was probably also very high. Thus, this was likely to be a crowded (and smelly) place. It's certainly not what we would imagine when we think of the birthplace for a king.

8. Luke 2:8-14 describes the visit of the angel to the shepherds. Why is this whole scene unreasonable and why is that exactly the reason God did it this way?

God is demonstrating that He is sending His Son for all people, not just the rich and religious. These shepherds are likely young and dirty. They are the ones taking care of the lambs that would end up being used as sacrifices in the Jewish Temple. It became their privilege to be the first to see the final sacrifice.

9. In Luke 2:11, we see three names for this new baby. What are they and why does he need three names?

Savior, Christ (Messiah), and Lord (Yahweh). These describe in full measure the scope of the power and authority given to Jesus. He was God, but He was also the one sent to be the savior of the world. He was the long-awaited Messiah.

10. What is it about Luke 2:15-17 that is again unexpected?

The shepherds would be trained to never leave their flocks, yet they all immediately run into Bethlehem to see if they could find this baby the angels described. These shepherds would not have been welcomed into town (since they were unclean both physically and ceremonially). These shepherds could not contain themselves once they verified that the new baby was exactly where the angels said it would be. They ran through the streets in the middle of the night shouting about their visitation. The city was packed with visitors, so it must have been a wild scene, but it was certainly not the entrance one would expect for a king. And yet, people who heard the news from the shepherds believed them.

11. Luke 2:18-20 describes the end to this scene. How would you describe those directly affected by this event?

The shepherds will never be the same, yet they went back to their flocks. They were changed, and yet they ended up doing what they had always done, but with a different spirit. Mary and Joseph never saw the angels; they only heard about them. But the visit by the shepherds gave them even more confirmation of what they had heard from the angel Gabriel nine months earlier. Throughout her life Mary will experience one surprise after the other. There is simply no way for her to foresee the next turn in the road as the mother of the Messiah. But she is willing to let God be in charge and do her best to hang on, serving the God she loves.

12. Over the past four sermons we have considered for roles that God assumed when He decided to send Jesus to earth. What were they and why were they each important to the reorientation of mankind that He was trying to engineer?

1. God speaks – we need God to communicate with us; we need to hear what He has to say to us; we need to hear His voice to know that it really is God. Having Him talk with us leads to a more intimate relationship than if He simply acted without communicating.
2. God came – God needed to show us He was still interested enough in our welfare to send His son. He could have just sent a message urging us to stop sinning, but that hadn't worked in the past, so there was not much hope it would work now.
3. God dwelled – Jesus didn't just make a quick appearance (like the angels), but He came to live, and in doing so He showed us how to live. God continues to dwell within us (in the form of the Holy Spirit) to give us the resources with which to live a holy life if we'll just give over control of our lives to Him.
4. God saved – This was the whole purpose. God wants to offer us eternal life with Him. Jesus was sent to be the pathway. Salvation starts with the manger, not the cross. It starts when we are reborn, not when we die.

Thus, all four of these roles were necessary and interconnected.

13. As we close this Advent study, having looked at the impact of the events on the shepherds, Mary & Joseph, and all those who were in Bethlehem at the time, what is the impact of these events on us 2000 years later?

It is still as miraculous a chain of events as it ever was. God decided to send His son to earth and then orchestrated to coming to tell exactly the story He wanted to tell, to fulfill Old Testament prophecy, and to illustrate for each of us the depth of His love for us. As with Mary, we need to ponder these things in our heart and then live our lives in the full realization that God loves us so much that He sent His only son to be our Savior. As Pastor Steve said, we need to look for salvation in exactly the opposite places of where we think. We need to look for it in the ordinary, not the extraordinary.