

The Heart of Christmas
Rev. Dr. Kim Engelmann
West Valley Presbyterian Church

Christmas Message for Heart of Christmas

**You have just heard the Christmas story
The kids sang about it and acted it out
The adults read scripture and sang about it as well
It's a great story to remember every year...but it is more than
just A GREAT STORY
The truth is that this story...this Christmas story...is OUR
STORY**

How is it our story?

**Well the first reason is that Jesus Christ is still being born in
people's hearts today. We serve a living Savior and he is at
work in the world transforming lives.**

**In another way though, this story exists in scripture – and all
stories exist in scripture – for us...so that we can begin to
identify with the people who encountered God and Christ –
and see ourselves in them.**

**So I want this to get real personal this morning and pull this
concert out of a general celebration of Christmas and make it
about you & your relationship to God this Christmas**

*I want you to think for a minute about all those faces at the
manger that we read and sang about, and then pick one of
those faces that you can most identify with.*

MAGI:

One set of faces are the faces of the Magi, who probably were the latest ones on the scene

They were the first Gentiles to ever worship Jesus – it is a symbol of Christ's birth being for the entire world...

And they are not Kings (like the song says)...these are magi... wise men who studied the stars...and probably consulted with Kings in Persia – highly educated folks

These magi measured and calculated and planned and discussed all the time

And when they saw the star in the East rising they knew it meant something that was significant for all times and places – a King of Kings was born

They logically deduced their way to Jesus

They figured out generally where and when he would be born and they found him through rational means

No angels got them to Jesus...it was simply their own ability to look at the facts, navigate the stars, and figure it out

Maybe you identify most with the MAGI

Maybe you are a rational kind of a person,

Many like CS Lewis (erudite Oxford scholar), or Lee Strobel (brilliant lawyer) have come to Christ just because they went on a journey looking at the evidence and said "this One is for real"

If you are rational and analytic, not prone to emotional stuff, then if you haven't already I encourage you to look at the evidence and see the truth of what we stand for today – Jesus Christ at the heart of Christmas born for you

SHEPHERDS:

Then again, other faces at the manger are the shepherds.

Maybe you are someone who just likes to mind their own business – life is too complicated as it is and you are just doing what you have to do to survive

The shepherds are you then, because in this story...what are they doing? Are they seeking God?

Nope. They are just doing their own thing...trying to do what they got to do..

Out in the fields at night, watching those sheep – making a living...doing the normal stuff of life

The shepherds were the opposite of the magi

Where the magi were wealthy and elite, the shepherds were the poorest of the poor – those on the night shift were the lowest of the low in the shepherd hierarchy as well

Maybe you're on the night shift right now too

Maybe you are watching/caring for a loved one who is ill, Or navigating through a hard relationship, or making some hard decisions

Maybe you've been in a place where you have felt poor – maybe its financial, but maybe you've felt poor at this Christmas time because you don't have family or friends, or you are simply not in the mood for this season because you are in grief or are dealing with some other burden...

You are just doing your own thing...getting through it like the shepherds

And then suddenly...God breaks in Unexpected, wonderful, brilliant

That's like the shepherds. In the night watch, God enters in through his messengers, the angels -

It was so unexpected that it scared the shepherds out of their wits at first..."The Glory of the Lord shone around them and they were sore afraid."

And God then speaks through the angels and says to the lowest of the low

Jesus is here! Go see him...

Some of you have shared with me how God has broken into your darkness, and how you were changed – you thought you'd used up all of God's grace and patience – but then he was there for you – broke into your night – you met Jesus, and it changed everything

If you are in a dark place today, minding your own business look up and say "God, break in for me." Then watch out! If you pray that prayer honestly you will experience Jesus Christ at the heart of Christmas born for you.

MARY:

Then there is the face of Mary at the manger.

Young Mary was probably about 12 or 13 when she was engaged to Joseph

Now Mary had been born and raised in a Jewish family

She knew how to do all the right things, and had always been religious

Maybe you've been raised in the church, and you too know how to be religious and do all the right things

But the angel who came to Mary, had a different message to her than that she should just keep doing the right things as a good religious person

The angel doesn't say anything to Mary about religious protocol

Rather, the angel calls Mary into a living relationship

A relationship with God in the most intimate tender way possible

As the mother and friend of Immanuel...God with us...Jesus the Christ/Messiah who would save his people from their sins!

If you are a religious person...doing the formalities of church...that is not a bad thing

As long as it pulls you into a living relationship with God

As the months went by after the visitation of the angel, Mary was aware of a new life in her that had not been there before...

When we say “Come into my heart Lord Jesus” we too will be aware of a new life in us that wasn’t there before and we will rejoice in Jesus Christ who is the heart of Christmas born for you.

Joseph:

**Finally there is the face of Joseph, Jesus’ earthly human father
We know from Scripture that Joseph is an honorable man
Probably a carpenter or a stone-mason, just a peasant, but
seemingly very kind and humble
Scripture doesn’t talk too much about Joseph but one thing
we do know...**

**He is saddled with responsibility beyond what seems
reasonable; God puts Joseph in situations that would stress
all of us out – that seem to a no win...**

And God comes through for him every time

**First, when Joseph finds that Mary is pregnant, he thinks Mary
has had an affair and is distraught and was going to divorce
her.**

**The shame of this in a small little town, where stoning the
woman was the punishment for infidelity, was intense.**

**But God comes through for Joseph in a dream and tells him
“Its okay Joseph. The child in Mary was conceived by the
Holy Spirit. It is ok that she is your wife”.**

So Joseph is relieved, and able to keep Mary.

**Then there’s the census in Bethlehem, and the long journey
there with Mary who is about to deliver. There is no room for
Mary at the inn...and I am sure Joseph is frantic...but a
manger opens up...the perfect crib. And shepherds visit, and
angels sing. God came through again, and Joseph is relieved.**

Finally there is the slaughter of all the firstborn sons in the area because Herod is so jealous that a new King has been born.

He is not sure who it is, but he is on a rampage.

Jesus' life is in danger.

Again I am sure Joseph doesn't know what to do, and he is probably frantic again.

But in a dream God tells him to go to Egypt, and Joseph and Mary and Jesus escape Herod's wrath.

(By the way, do you see the parallel between the NT Joseph and the OT Joseph both being spoken to by God in dreams?

And where does God tell Joseph, Jesus' Dad to go, to save Jesus' life? To Egypt..just like the OT Joseph went to

Egypt.This is not an accident...the author does this on purpose – connects the OT to the NT all the time)

Today, maybe you are like Joseph - saddled with responsibility; stressed out by circumstances beyond your control, with people depending on you in big ways. Just like for Joseph, God will be faithful to you.

He will make a way where there might seem to be no way. That's what Joseph reminds us of...the faithfulness of God in every and all situations.

May God who was faithful to bring us Jesus, be faithful to you this Christmas, in whatever situation you find yourself in. May he use that situation to draw you closer to the living Jesus Christ who is the Heart of Christmas.

AMEN