

Aveleigh's Year of The Bible, Dec. 23 2018
Fourth Sunday of Advent
Sermon: HOW TO BE BLESSED BY GOD THIS CHRISTMAS
Text: Luke 2: 4-7 p. 1100

Call to worship

One: Walking toward Bethlehem,

All: Listening every step of the way

One: For the sound of our name,

All: For the announcement that we have found favor with God.

One: Walking toward Bethlehem,

All: Watching every step of the way

One: For a new star in the sky,

All: For guidance in our daily lives.

One: Walking toward Bethlehem,

All: Sensing we are not alone.

One: Angels are all around us.

All: The prayers of saints surround us.

One: Walking toward Bethlehem,

All: Hoping we shall find a baby in a manger:

One: A simple sign that God loves us still

All: And reason enough to sing God's praise.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Jesus, we are tired. We are rushing about, from parties to shopping, to concerts and more. We're captivated by the beauty of the season, but we're exhausted from the busyness we create. Slow us down, Jesus. It would be a tragedy to get to January and realized that we missed you, that we missed caring for those you care about or sharing your story with those who are lost and lonely. Help us to find balance, to stop and be still, to see you around us and to be "you" to all we meet. We love this season. Help us to keep you as the center of every party, every gift, every concert, everything. May you be made great in all that we do. Amen.

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INTRO: THOSE GOD BLESSED AT THE FIRST CHRISTMAS

1. LIKE JOSEPH: COOPERATE WITH GOD'S PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE!

“Joseph was a good man and didn’t want to publicly disgrace Mary, so he planned to quietly divorce her. But an angel appeared to him in a dream . . . When Joseph woke up, he did exactly what the angel of the Lord had commanded him to do, and took Mary home as his wife.”

Matthew 1:19-24

2. LIKE THE SHEPHERDS: CELEBRATE THAT JESUS IS HERE!

“The shepherds hurried to Bethlehem and there they found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in a manger. When they had seen him . . . they returned to their fields, singing praises and thanking God for all they had heard and seen, which happened just as the angel had told them.” Luke 2:16 & 20

3. LIKE MARY: CONTEMPLATE GOD'S WORD!

“Then the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. Everyone else who heard the shepherds' story were amazed, but, Mary **TREASURED UP** all the words she heard and **CONTINUED TO QUIETLY PONDER THEM** in her heart.”

Luke 2:17-19

4. **LIKE THE WISE MEN: DEDICATE MY TIME AND MY GIFTS TO JESUS!** “When the Wise Men saw the child with his mother Mary, they bowed down and worshiped him! Then they opened their treasure chests and presented him with gifts of gold and incense and myrrh. And being warned by God in a dream, they headed home by a different way.”
Matthew 2:11

FOUR FOR THE ROAD: 1. How do we see Joseph responding to God’s command? What has God been prompting you to do? How could you make this a priority? How might this clear the way for God to act? Does it matter if you understand it or not?

2. Read also Luke 2:8-15. Even though the shepherds were of the lowest status, an angel of the Lord appeared to them to announce Good News for all people. How did knowing God was near affect the shepherds? What did they do with what they heard? In what ways will you respond to the Good News this Christmas?

3. Imagine for a moment you are Mary, scared, young, and being told by an angel that you’re going to give birth to God’s Son! How would you have reacted? Scripture tells us she treasured and pondered God’s words to her. In what ways does God prompt us to ponder, contemplate, or think more deeply about his Word?

4. The wise men were the most educated and intelligent people of their time, and they followed God’s star to find his promised Messiah. In what ways have you sought Jesus in your life? Why is it still wise to seek Jesus?

CHRISTMAS BONUS QUESTION: What are you giving Jesus for his birthday this Christmas? It’s easy to think he already has everything—but he doesn’t have your heart if you haven’t yet given it to him—or your faith, trust, love, loyalty...he doesn’t have whatever it is you are holding back. What are some things or heart attitudes you can give him? How will you go about it?

PRAYER: Jesus Christ, I want to give you myself in a greater way this Christmas. I want you to choose me and use me. I want your blessing in 2019. And so today, Lord, I want to start cooperating with your plan instead of making all my own plans. And today, Lord, I want to start celebrating your forgiveness and your free gift of salvation to me. Help me to live more with gratitude and less with crankiness, more with thankfulness and less with worry. God, I want to give you my attention. I want to be a woman of the Word or a man of the Word. I want to contemplate. I want to listen. I want to pay attention. I want to not have a day go by that I don’t listen to your Word to me. And God, like the wise men, I want to seek you, and when I find you I want to give you the best I’ve got. My gifts, my talents, my time. I ask you to receive my gifts this Christmas because of what you’ve done for me. In your name I pray, amen.