

Best Christmas Ever? Part 3: Another Ordinary Christmas

Luke 2:1-7, Micah 5:2, Acts 20:35, John 10:10

Christmas can be, and promises to be, an extraordinary time. It's supposed to be "the most wonderful time of the year!" But Christmas can be the worst. A lot can ruin it... Relatives, having to share holidays, things don't go your way, traditions aren't cared about you don't get what you want. Christmas seems to bring a lot that just isn't very merry. The ordinary ends up ruining the extraordinary

How do we deal with that? Complain. Fight back Pretend like everything is ok, but ultimately hold on to our anger. Or just give up and go to Hawaii next year.

It's the same with the rest of the year too isn't it? We want the kids' birthday to be amazing but none of the other kids show up or your kid pouts the whole time. You're looking forward to that date but you have to work late or the kids get sick. You got a bonus check this year... your transmission goes out. And let's not even mention family road trips.

The ordinary will always hide the extraordinary... if we let it. Think about it... What do all of those have in common? YOU not getting what you want. YOUR expectations weren't met. YOU not getting your way. The number one destroyer of Christmas cheer is... Selfishness. You have the most power to ruin your Christmas. If we let it, the ordinary will eclipse the extraordinary. On Christmas and every other day of the year

It's been that way for all of human history. Even true on the first Christmas for Mary and Joseph. We're gonna look at the account of that first Christmas... when Jesus was born. And we'll see that the ordinary keeps trying to eclipse the extraordinary. The pivotal moment in the history of the universe was about to happen and ordinary life kept trying to butt in and ruin it. The king of the universe was going to come live with humanity and the whole event is crowded with annoyances!

In fact, if I were there, if you were there... the story would probably be very different because we would've just given up and gone home. What we'll see is, even though the ordinary kept trying to hide the extraordinary, Mary and Joseph didn't let it. They chose to look past their immediate circumstances and see the extraordinary that was happening around them. They kept their focus on the bigger picture and their part in it. What we'll discover is that having the best Christmas ever is about choosing to focus on our part in the extraordinary. It's true for every other ordinary day as well.

The ancient historian Luke went and interviewed people who had known Jesus, who had lived with Jesus. Some experts think Luke even interviewed Jesus' mother Mary or his little brother James. After he collected all of his information, he wrote it all down in order to tell the story of Jesus' life. We call it the Gospel of Luke. In this book or letter, Luke describes the circumstances in which Jesus was born. And what tends to be forgotten among all the angels and miracles is that the first Christmas was actually very ordinary.

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (Luke 2:1)

Caesar Augustus ruled the Roman Empire from 27 BC-14 AD. One of his great accomplishments was reforming the Roman tax system. He decreed that taxation was to be determined by a population census to ensure fair taxes.

This was the first census that took place while [most likely “before”] Quirinius was governor of Syria. (Luke 2:2)

One of Quirinius’ first tasks as governor was a census for taxation.

And everyone went to their own town to register. (Luke 2:3)

Going to your ancestral home for a census and taxation was in the Jewish cultural tradition. So the Romans were trying to be culturally inoffensive in an area that was already difficult to control.

What strikes you most about this nail-biting account? It’s just so... ORDINARY. Where’s the magic? Where are the halos around Mary and Joseph. It all just seems like normal life doesn’t it?

And there is so much that they could’ve complained about. They could’ve complained about having to pay Roman taxes, or the fact that they were under Roman control in the first place, or they could’ve complained about the huge disruption this whole thing was for their daily, comfortable, routine, lives. But there’s not mention of any complaining in this account.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. (Luke 2:4-5)

The journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem is about 80 miles. On foot it would have taken Mary and Joseph 7-10 days to make the journey. They could have complained about this ordeal as well. Having to travel for at least a week on foot? Not to mention Mary is probably pretty pregnant at this point. Imagine traveling on foot and/or donkey, sleeping on the ground every night while you’re in your third trimester. I’ve seen that it’s not a very fun time in your own home in 2017. They most likely, were not traveling alone, but in a caravan. Where they would have had to deal with all types of personalities and sideways glances, and kids who hadn’t been parented the “Baby-wise” way. So much to complain about.

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. (Luke 2:6-7)

Imagine having to give birth in the first century. Now imagine having to do that in a stable or cave, probably with strangers in the stall next to you and without any family around. There is so much that Mary and Joseph could have complained about. Ordinary life kept trying to ruin what was supposed to be, what was promised to be, a momentous, meaningful, universe changing occasion! And Mary didn’t even get to have her birth mix-tape with her.

Plus, Mary’s cousin Elizabeth got to have an amazing birth story. If you look back at Chapter One. Elizabeth’s pregnancy is announced in the center of Jerusalem at the Temple and is celebrated as a miracle by everyone who hears about it. While poor Mary is in a stable, far from home where she is probably ridiculed because of being pregnant without being married anyway. Mary could have easily started thinking, “Why does Elizabeth get all the attention and the good life?”

This whole story seems like a battle of the ordinary trying to hide the extraordinary. Thing after thing is being thrown at them to ruin the joy...to discourage them and make them give up. They could've focused on themselves and their wants, complained, given up, fought with each other and literally ruined the first Christmas.

Instead they trusted that God knew what He was doing and they went. They knew the extraordinary was working behind the scenes in spite of the ordinary pains, annoyances, and discomforts. God was using the ordinary to accomplish the extraordinary

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.” (Micah 5:2)

700 years before Jesus was born. God promised, through the prophet Micah, that the Savior would be born in Bethlehem. He used every annoyance the ordinary problems of life... taxes, government, pregnancy, to make the extraordinary happen. Got used the all of this to fulfill His promise to bring a savior for the world.

God often uses the ordinary to create the extraordinary.

What would have happened if Joseph and Mary decided the trip was too much for them or the taxes were unfair and stupid or rebelled against the government? What if Mary refused to go with Joseph? Or if they chose to wallow in self-pity or let jealousy win? What would they have missed out on? What would we have missed out on?

But they chose to get their focus off of themselves and trusted God and were used to usher in the greatest gift humanity has ever received.

See, the ordinary can't win if we focus on our part in the extraordinary story of God.

We have two options this Christmas (and this year) when the ordinary starts hiding the extraordinary. We can do the usual... complain and give in to self-pity. Or we can trust God and play our part in his extraordinary story.

But what is our part? It's so simple...

...remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' (Acts 20:35b)

Our part is to GIVE. Stop focusing on yourself and what you're NOT getting and focus on others. Give of yourself to help meet the needs of others.

How do you keep those relatives from ruining Christmas? GIVE. Put their needs and even their wants and preferences above your own. Nobody wants to host Christmas dinner? Host it. Passive aggressive comments? Tell them how much you love them. Those kids that weren't raised the way you would do it? Watch them for a while so the adults can have a break. Cousin keeps bragging? Celebrate with her.

Our part in the extraordinary is giving God's love to others.

Realize that God is behind the scenes using the ordinary to create the extraordinary. We just have to look for where He is working and join Him in it.

And accept God is working behind the scenes for you too. He wants to take your ordinary problems, worries, and even your hopes and make them into an extraordinary life.

**The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full [abundantly, an extraordinary life].
(John 10:10)**

Jesus promises that if you follow him he will give you an extraordinary life. He is the Good Shepherd. We hear his voice and are invited to follow Him everyday. He meets our needs. He provides protection and comfort and security... now and for eternity.

You are where you are for a reason, just like Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem for a reason. The amazing thing is... It's the same reason! To give you the gift of an eternal relationship with Jesus. Are you following him? Is he your shepherd? Can you say that you are a Jesus follower?

Jesus grew up. Lived a perfect life of love. Then died to take the punishment for the evil we've done. He rose from the dead proving he is God and that his sacrifice was accepted as a substitute for us. And now he offers the invitation to follow him. This is the most extraordinary offer for an extraordinary life (now and forever) from the most extraordinary person who ever lived.

The best Xmas ever belongs to those who follow Jesus.

But you have to choose to believe and stop trying to find your own way. Trust and follow. Just like Mary and Joseph. And you will experience the extraordinary even in the middle of every ordinary day.

God wants to fill you with His love and then love others through you.

We've adopted a saying at Crosscreek...
"Following Jesus will make your life better and make you better at life."
This is never truer than when you let God love others through you.

Wouldn't it be great to have a Christmas where you're not worried about what you're getting or not getting? Where you're not concerned about what's going your way or what's not going your way?

But a Christmas where your primary concern is giving others what they want and need?

Don't let the ordinary steal the extraordinary things God wants to show you, and the extraordinary ways he wants to use you.

Follow Jesus, accept his love for yourself and for others and he will give you your part to play in the extraordinary.