

A Light in the Darkness

Part 1: Unexpected

Matthew 1:18-19

INTRO

One favorite xmas tradition- lights... have to keep it modest (budget/time)... would go crazy if I could.

Driving around looking at lights...

WE:

So many putting them up early this year.

What is it?

I think... something about light shining in the darkness... in these long/dark nights, dark year, these colors/bright lights shine out in joy and hope. Chasing the darkness away.

World seems dark. Even before 2020... if we look around the world, lives, reality... a lot of darkness.

Turmoil, wars, broken relationships, separation, isolation, guilt, fear, pain (many times not bc of our choices either)...

Always been this way... think of the 1st century... a world lit only by fire... not electricity...

So much physical darkness, so much superstition/ignorance, fear of God or gods...

Rome: might makes right

Jews: Follow these impossible rules and laws... if not you are cast out into the darkness

The darkness was overwhelming...

Darkness seems overwhelming... until even the tiniest light is lit.

BUT... God is a God of light not darkness... he had a plan to bring a blazing light into the dark world and our own darkness...

John put it this way... **John 1:9** **The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world**

Christmas shows us that **No matter how dark it gets, the light will always break through.**

But... It just might not look the way we expect...

GOD:

Matthew- One of Jesus' closest followers. Knew Mary, James.

Probably written in 60's or 70's AD

V. 18a This is how Jesus the Messiah [Promised One. Savior. Greek- Christ] **was born.**

"This is how God's promised plan to save the world happened."

Why do we need saving?

When we look around us (and in us) we see a darkness that we are powerless to illuminate.

- Sure we try
- Politics / Laws / Moral codes / Classroom Rules
- At least try to protect/insulate ourselves from it... money / power / independence / ignore / control those around us.

Biblical writings say darkness caused by **sin**.

The things we do to look out for ourselves... just hurts/marginalizes others & creates more darkness.

If you are a parent / care about a child(ren)... and you saw your children in pain, trouble, harm's way.. What do you do? You step in. You step between. You do something.

Throughout history (in Jewish scriptures from Adam/Abraham/Moses/David) God had promised a savior to save humanity from the unfixable darkness we see around us and in us.

Matthew is saying, "This is how God chose to bring light in the darkness... and I know it's going to sound crazy, it's not what you would expect... but I saw him, talked with him, ate with him... and I know the people who were there from the beginning."

Matthew's Point: **God's love for humanity moved him to break into human history.**

Starts with what seems the craziest/hardest to believe part... even the "heroes" of the story don't believe it at first...

V. 18-19 This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly.

If this idea of a "virgin birth" is a little too hard to believe, you're in good company.

Jesus' human father didn't believe it either. Why? Same reason it's hard for us to believe.... That's not how things work. (Sorry parents of young ones)

Kinda the point of a miracle though, right?

Paint the scenario Joseph finds himself in...

Mary being pregnant before marriage was a HUGE deal at the time...

- Scandal in a small, tight-knit community of ancient near-Eastern social norms & culture.
- Engagement was a legally binding agreement between families. So this was a BIG deal!

There were only three explanations for something like this to happen...

- Either Joseph dishonored Mary, her family, and his own family
- Mary had been taken advantage of (which she wasn't claiming)
- Or she had willfully committed adultery.

Joseph's reputation was at stake (more in a couple of weeks)... the community would think either he was dishonorable or didn't care that his wife slept around.

B/c engagement was legally binding- only divorce could end it...

Jewish and Roman law demanded that a man divorce his wife for adultery...

So in order to be "righteous" (follow law and custom) he needed to divorce Mary.

BUT... he's more than just "Law Following righteous" (sorry, that's the rule, period. Tough luck!)... he's "merciful righteous"... his decision balances law with compassion...

Understood... **For God, mercy and compassion always outshine law and punishment.** (seems like God chose the right guy to raise the Messiah?)

This pregnancy (in Joseph's eyes) had already ruined Mary's life... not much chance for remarriage... would bring shame on her whole family... could legally be stoned to death... possibly kicked out of home, no protection for rest of her life... not many options for defenseless, homeless teenage single mothers in that culture.

Didn't want to add even more to her shame/humiliation... decided to divorce her quietly...

Even though he had a right to do it publicly to claim the dowry from her family.

So why did God choose this as how he would start his rescue plan?

- Not how anyone would write the story. Nor expect.
- Why make it so difficult on J and M?
- Might be theological/deep meaning.. But honestly... Don't know for sure.
- Do know it wasn't an accident- **Isaiah 7:14 All right then, the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means 'God is with us')**
- It was the plan all along.

- **God often breaks through the darkness in ways we don't expect or immediately see.**

What Jesus did his whole life...

Everyone expected a warrior/priest king to destroy Rome... reignite passion for the torah/law...

Instead he brought light in the most **unexpected** ways... told the Jews to pay their taxes to Rome, refused to be crowned king, rejected the traditions/rules of the religious elite and served the poor, the sinners, the outcasts.

YOU:

Is this how you expected your life to go?

Did you expect it to get as dark as it now seems?

Marriage, school, kids, grandkids, career...

Has this year been the year you expected?

Is it possible God has been using the unexpected to break through in ways you didn't expect?

Is it possible we've been expecting our lives to take certain paths (paths that we think are good/righteous) and expecting God to get on board with that path... that we haven't been able to see the light he has been shining?

Maybe it's time to change our focus and look for the ways he IS breaking through instead of asking him to break through in the ways we want/expect?

Prayer: (Let Xmas lights remind you to pray)

"God, where are you shining your light in my life? Break through the darkness and help me to see you and your light this Christmas."

It might not be very bright yet... but it's there.

Might start with a point of light here, then there, then grow and grow until the darkness is completely vanquished and we can see clearly.

There is no darkness dark enough to extinguish the smallest light of God's love.

It's there... but most likely not how you expect it.

WE:

There's more than darkness.

There's more than we can see and what we are dealing with.

There is a light that shines in the darkest parts of our lives.

There's something more for us...

And it isn't even something we were looking for... but it changed everything, for everyone, forever.

God is always breaking through the darkness in the most unexpected ways.

This Christmas you are invited to look into the light, experience God's love break through the darkness of our world and the darkness we feel in our own hearts.

How is God breaking through? It's there...

This Xmas you are invited to look and see what God has done and is doing.

SONG:

Noel by Lauren Daigle performed by Loopers and Aaron

- With Lyrics

Questions

1. This series is called "A Light in the Darkness" and this message is titled "Unexpected". What would be your own theme/title for Christmas and why?
2. Read John 1:1-9 (go to verse 18 for extra credit). What stands out to you in John's description of Jesus and his coming? Do you get any encouragement or insight from this passage?
3. Where do you see God's light in your life right now? How can your group pray for you this week?