

CITY CHURCH-EASTSIDE WEEKLY WORSHIP GUIDE

Anticipate: The Unanticipated Scandal

Perhaps we have thought so much of God as love eternal and we feel the warm pleasures of Christmas when he comes gently like a child. We have been shielded from the awful nature of Christmas and no longer feel afraid of the coming near of God Almighty. We have selected from the Christmas story only the pleasant bits, forgetting the awesome nature of an event in which the God of the universe, its Creator and Sustainer, draws near to this little planet, and now speaks to us. The coming of God is not only a message of joy, but also fearful news for anyone who has a conscience.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer,
Advent Sermon,
Dec. 2, 1928

A festive time? A multi-billion dollar operation? What comes to mind when we think of Christmas? For those amongst us that are exploring the claims of Christ much of this season year in and year out has been a cultural experience that hasn't eaten up too much personal bandwidth. If we do claim to follow Christ, the recurrent image image in our mind is that of baby Jesus, a cute little newborn wrapped in blankets. This Jesus is quite suitable for our holiday needs. He can go on cards, in commercials, and tiny ceramic nativity scenes. While celebrating the season can be enjoyable, domesticating Jesus through such media forms can lure us into missing the point all together. The reality of the birth of Christ is one of scandal.

In contemporary society 'scandal' is often a word associated with politicians and CEO's, not a label for Jesus. But yet this was the very essence of his birth. The genealogy of Matthew chapter one is not what we'd expect especially if one we're trying to convince others that Jesus is truly lord. Genealogies throughout the ages have been used to shore up royal claims to power and yet the genealogy of Jesus is marked by impropriety. It's here, right out of the gate, that the mission of Christ is defined. The shape of his lineage would in the end be the shape of his destiny, but with a twist. The regal king whose family was constituted by the likes of prostitutes would embark on a death march to the cross but live to tell about in his resurrection. In this way he reconstituted the family of God in his image transforming prostitutes into priests.

The nature of his birth, then, is not endearing so much as it is subversive. The all powerful messiah king, lay before the world in a manger of straw. This king would take upon himself our scandal and in turn grant us everlasting life. Genuine love for others cannot stem from religious or irreligious approaches, which focus merely on the self, but rather stems from an understanding that he has loved us with a scandalous affection.

In the film *It's a Wonderful Life* the main character George discovers that the life he always wanted was not the one he had expected. No description could be more accurate regarding the birth of Christ. The life we've always dreamed of was imparted to us by a life we never anticipated. The Messiah king, born in straw, now reigns in heaven

November 30, 2008



It's a Wonderful Life
1946
Liberty Films

Sermon Application

The questions and thoughts below can be used for further reflection this week. Seek to use a journal or discuss with a friend. Most of all use this to consider how the gospel of Christ can be transforming. Enjoy!

Application Questions Matthew 1:18-25

1. How is Jesus typically viewed amidst our broader culture during the holiday season?
2. "Undomesticate Jesus" was the exhortation of Matthew 1:18-25. How does this make you feel? How does this challenge preconceived notions of Christmas?
3. Based on assumption and details in the sermon what was the typical point of genealogies particularly as they related to royalty? How is Matthew's genealogy of Jesus different? How does this impact the authenticity of Matthew's text?
4. Read through the genealogy once more. Are there any names that are familiar? What do you know about these women or men? What kind of tone does this set for Jesus's life & work?
5. Why is it that Jesus had to be born as a human being? Considering his lineage and conditions at birth (a manger of straw). How does this inform us about God's love?
6. What makes you love others during the holiday season? Why do both religious & irreligious approaches to love ultimately fail. Why is love rooted in the love of Christ different? (Think here about our condition & the love of Christ).
7. A diagnostic question from Scott's sermon: "Am I willing to submit all of my cultural and family traditions to the Gospel, willing to let go of any practice that would take me away from greater worship of Christ? (we acknowledge that if Christ is Lord, everything is submitted to Him and if this feels threatening to me, it is worth exploring further why that is and is it possible I love something more than Him.)"

Advent Conspiracy-Worship Fully

By Jim Dolas

www.adventconspiracy.com

Amid the frenzied holiday rush between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day it's easy to forget that the Christmas story, the story of Emmanuel, is one of worship. Elizabeth praised God when Mary came to visit her and her child, John the Baptizer, leaped for joy in her womb. Mary worshiped at that time as well, saying, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my savior." Months later, after the angelic messenger announced the good news of Emmanuel, the armies of heaven worshiped in sight of the shepherds, saying, "Glory to God in the highest." That caused the shepherds to rush off to find the presence of God in the form of a newborn, and when they returned to their flocks they glorified and praised God. Even pagan astrologers saw a star and came to worship the newborn king of the Jews. And when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple to fulfill the law of Moses, the prophets Simeon and Anna rejoiced and praised God at the sight of the one who would be the consolation of Israel.

So what do all those events from two thousand years ago mean for us this Advent and Christmas season? Faithful or skeptic, religious or irreligious, our attitude should be one of reverent wonder and awe at the incredible mystery of Christmas that is God with us. The Son of God, who was one with the Father before time and space ever existed, invaded that same time and space by taking on the flesh and blood of sinful man. The work of redeeming creation began when the Word became flesh, and made his dwelling among us. "Behold," Jesus says, "the dwelling place of God is with man, and I am making all things new!"

I just thought, "Wow!" Just the poetry... Unknowable love, unknowable power, describes itself as the most vulnerable. There it was. I was sitting there, and it's not that it hadn't struck me before, but the tears came down my face and I saw the genius of this, the utter genius of picking a particular point in time and deciding to turn on this...love needs to find form; intimacy needs to be whispered. To me, it makes sense. It's actually logical. It's pure logic. Essence has to manifest itself. It's inevitable. Love has to become action or something concrete. It would have to happen. There must be an incarnation. Love must be made flesh.

Bono
Bono: In Conversation
With Michka Assayas

Scripture Readings for Advent

Use the texts below for Advent reflection this week.

- **Mon**-Isaiah 9:1-7
- **Tues**-Matthew 1:1-17
- **Weds**-Matthew 1:18-25
- **Thur**-Matthew 2:1-12
- **Fri**-Matthew 2:13-23
- **Sat**-Matthew 3:1-12
- **Sun**-Matthew 3:13-17