

Not a Romantic Story, No Blueprints for Our Lives Life in the Spirit Reunion
Advent, Monday, December 5, 2011 7:00 PM (Jesus coming and staying)

Tonight I am going to speak about Advent and actually Christmas. **Here we have romanticized the story of Christmas. It is really not a romantic story.**

If you go to the Old Testament you could see that **people knew that they could encounter God at various times, but they didn't want to.** There was a case, an occasion, in which various people were prophesying in the camp of Moses and people were upset. They went to Moses and said, "Hey, these people were prophesying and we told them to shut up," and Moses said, "No, let them prophesy. I wish everyone would prophesy; I wish the Holy Spirit would come down to everybody." They said, "Oh, no"; they didn't want that. On another occasion God had actually offered to come down and people were saying, "No, if we see God, we will die." At one point actually God said he would actually come through the camp, but the people would only see his backside. Now what's the backside of God? I don't know. But they didn't see his face, whatever that is, the light; they didn't see the light. So this is the way it was and **people did not want to have an experience of God.** But sometimes it was forced upon them for the sake of God's need, that **God needed to have someone experience him so that he could have cooperators, helpers.** That's the idea of prophecy. The prophets were his messengers, very different from the priests who were the ministers of the temple. They really didn't know God. **The prophets at least listened to God and received his message.**

Now when we move into the story of the angel Gabriel, the angel Gabriel is also a prophet of a sort, but not a human one; **prophet and angel are almost the same idea—messengers. When the angel Gabriel came to Mary,** as I say, we have always romanized this story: isn't this lovely! But it really wasn't so lovely; **it was actually scary.** Now at that time if a woman was found to be pregnant outside of wedlock, she could be stoned to death. That would be considered proof of adultery. So when the angel Gabriel asked Mary to become the mother of the God Most High, I mean, she was very perplexed, not only because she was a virgin and not married; **she was perplexed because the consequences in her society were dire.**

Now **Joseph** who was betrothed to her did not actually want to continue with the relationship, with the marriage proposal; he **tried to divorce her, but again was alerted by some angelic messenger.** Tradition has always held Joseph to be older than Mary; Mary was probably only thirteen. Joseph was probably an adult in his twenties or thirties; **he may have been married before** because there is mention of other children in the family, so he could have been married before. We do know how Mark talks about how the children of Jesus' family, his so-called brothers and sisters, thought he was crazy; that's actually what the Greek says. The **Pharisees** later on said, "We are no illegitimate breed" in regard to Jesus, so they **were aware of the circumstance in which he was conceived outside of marriage.** And **Mary accepted this role believing apparently that God would protect her,** lead her through this, but that was really faith! She really put her life in God's hands.

Now we don't really know the circumstances of Jesus' birth, but it's usually said that **he was born in Bethlehem**. Matthew says that; Luke says that. But the other circumstances we do not know. What we do know is that **Jesus was born into a family that was hardly noble**. Matthew begins the gospel with Jesus' genealogy, and he includes all kinds of very unsavory characters. It's important to realize that when God chose to come into human life, he did not create some sort of extraordinary family to come into. **He came into a very troubled family in terms of the family tree going way back, and in terms of the actual people he lived with**. It is unlikely that he lived in what we call today a "nuclear family"; that's relatively unlikely. **People lived in big groupings with all kinds of relatives**. And the Aramaic word *achim* means both brothers and sisters, and cousins. **So he lived with other children, and apparently was not the favorite, but says they considered him crazy**.

Now the whole idea of God coming into human life is really something that is so extraordinary that we really don't grasp it, that **God really not only takes on our nature, but takes on our condition**. And it's important that we recognize that **the condition that Jesus came into was the condition of brokenness**, and not only in general, and not only in the abstract, but in the particular. It is very clear in Scripture that God did not come to save the righteous or to release the righteous only. Luke does focus on that, on the idea of saving the righteous and giving the good news to the poor and so on, but it is not only the righteous. **God really came into our world to convert, to change, the wicked**, so not only the **broken in the sense of a little bit screwy but also broken in the sense of really turned away from God**.

And in our families we have people that are also somewhat screwy and some are actually wicked. We probably have relatives who aren't good people. They have made terrible choices and maybe they live in sin; maybe they are just habitually living in sin. But Jesus came for them; we have to keep that in mind. The story of God's mercy told at this time of year is the story of God coming to bring light to those in darkness. Those in darkness are not simply people who are ignorant. Darkness has many different facets. And Jesus in his ministry really touched every kind of disorder: disorders of the body such as blindness and deafness, disorders such as disease, but he also touched disorders of the spirit, and disorders of the will including sin and malice. And yet as we enter into the season of Advent and Christmas **it is sometimes our own families that cause us a great deal of suffering**; because of their brokenness, because of their darkness, even because of their malice, **they really are for us an obstacle to grace, but then somehow we are missing the point because God has come for all including the worst**.

So how are we going to now think about this wonderful mystery of God becoming human in such a way God can come into our lives in spite of our condition, as Jesus took a place in a home in Nazareth in spite of the conditions that no one really would prefer? **How are we going to deal with those members of our families who aren't particularly loving toward us, who aren't particularly understanding, maybe think we are crazy?** There is a way. And **this is what we need to pray about and to realize that it is scary to follow God's will**. It is scary to accept God's invitation to be his vessel, so to speak. That is really what we believe we are if we come to the Eucharist. **We believe we are God's vessel: that God has somehow embodied himself in our world**

and now we carry that embodiment in our own bodies sacramentally. So how are we going to be a sacrament to those around us, to those who are broken, to those who are perhaps resistant, those who have rejected us?

Now the story of Christ coming is not a story of magic. It's not a story about how suddenly everything is wonderful. Unfortunately, I think, a lot of people expect that kind of story, but that isn't the real story. **Everything isn't wonderful at all, and nonetheless it happens. God does come and God does stay.** And so as his believers, as his followers, as his disciples **we have to find a way of letting him somehow manifest himself through us,** through our condition, whatever that is, **even in the midst of all kinds of negativity and rejection and turning away.** So that's the agenda the gospel brings us tonight. And **there are no blueprints for your own personal life.** But in one way or another God will help you through this season to be open, to be there for him.