

Title: **Fresh hope from an old story**

SERIES: **The Paradox of Christmas**

Paradox- an apparently self-contradictory, yet true, statement or situation

Many of us have a love/hate relationship with Advent, the time leading up to Christmas morn-

The music, the smells, the decorations....the long lines, the crying children, the endless tasks

Illu- picking out tree: 2 trips; kids smashed by photo backdrop; target decorations- kids gotta pee!

The Tension

Christmas ought to be: A time of reflecting & rejoicing

Christmas often is: A time of neglecting & nagging

In all our planning to celebrate we never took time to contemplate

And in so doing, Merry Christmas becomes Messy Christmas

so now instead of joy with one another, we have judgement and jealousy against each other

instead of grace towards others, we have grudges against each other

instead of gratefulness, we exhibit grumpiness

instead of practicing generosity we participate in greediness

Card on the table: My desire for you and me is to bring our hearts back to a posture of awe and reverence,

reflecting, and rejoicing- despite the craziness of the season, or the hecticness in our homes

I'm gonna shoot 3 buckshot's, 3 Paradoxes of the Biblical Xmas narrative,

and pray at least one resonates with you enough to STOP reflect on God & rejoice in Him

Luke 2:1-12 (READ)

Reflect on the Paradox of Heavenly Glory displayed in Earthly Obscurity

- The birth of the Messiah, an event of cosmic significance, occurs in an obscure town (Bethlehem)
The baby, which is the God-man Immanuel, is presented in a less than normal setting (a manger)
It is first announced in glorious fashion, to some of the lowest in social status (Shepherds)
It defies expectations
- *Reflect:* This shows that God's glory often manifests in unexpected ways, in unexpected places, and to unexpected people.
He breaks out of the box we expect God to work in; He tramples our 'no trespassing' signs
- *Application:* If God works in such ways, here's what that means for you and I

God looks to us to display His glory, not only in the open, but in obscurity as well

Not just how you treat your bros/sis @ church on Sunday, how do u treat your wife on Tuesday?

Not only in how you talk to an unbeliever about the gospel, how do you talk to your kids?

Not only being careful what you post on social media but being careful how you walk privately.

"Your God is too glorious", Chad Bird-

“God hides in plain sight. In our world, on our streets, in the back alleys and warehouses and boardrooms that look nothing like God’s hangouts. He’s dressed up as the misfits who embarrass us and the tollbooth workers we pass by unnoticed. And he’s beneath our skin too. He has sunk himself into our unglamorous lives that there he might do what he does best: give, love, serve, help, and pray. The little things we do—like pouring cereal for our sleepy children before school, driving a delivery truck to keep businesses rolling, visiting a friend who’s laid up in the hospital—these seemingly little things are divine deeds over which angels rejoice. The evening news will never report on them. The church newsletter won’t mention them. No one will upload a YouTube video about them that goes viral. Yet that’s their hidden beauty: unnoticed by earth, applauded by heaven. To us they seem as natural and boring as watching the grass grow. But to God, they are his humble, holy niche in a world blinded by bigger, better, bolder.”

You want to experience God’s presence and power? You don’t need a retreat in the mountains to do so-

Love your husband despite his flaws- see God’s power firsthand

Help your wife carry the load of the home- watch God’s glory firsthand

Treat your coworkers with respect, be kind to those you frequent, do the little things-

and see God empower you because He cares not only about what’s open/public,
but also, what’s obscure/private

Matthew 2:1-12

Reflect on the Paradox that **those with the greatest resources failed to see what those with simple faith saw**

- King Herod was geographically close to King Jesus, yet couldn’t find him- *HOSTILE* (makes sense for HIM)
The Chief Priests & Scribes had the writings and intellectual knowledge but no zeal- *APATHETIC* (no sense)

The men from the East had limited knowledge of the Messianic prophecy (left behind from Jewish exile?)

Geographically they were at a disadvantage; but what little they had they made up for in faith-

Faith of what the star meant (???: Numbers 24:17 ...A star will come from Jacob, and a scepter will arise from Israel....)

Faith to prepare and embark on a loooooong journey

Faith to present treasures to this child King, because they treasured Him at heart

V2- “...we saw his star...” V3- “When King Herod *heard* this...”

- Reflect:* Men from the far East saw because of faith; Men from Judah failed to notice because of apathy
- Application:* I’m convinced that-

The greatest threat to the faith of the Church, in our context, is not apostasy, but apathy

Our theological knowledge, church attendance and morality will never make up for a lack of faith!

We are blessed and cursed to live in a time of great freedom and great technological advancement.

We can gather for worship- we can be picky of what church we attend, what preacher we hear,
what songs we sing in praise, what translation of the bible we buy; we can hear teaching and
preaching and have almost any question answered with a quick google search or ChatGPT prompt

and yet, we are one of the most biblically illiterate nations, what’s worse, as a whole, we have put
our trust in politicians and pastors and in so doing, diminished our personal relational faith in Christ

Here’s what God’s approach is to apathetic faith:

Revelation 3:15-17 I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were cold or hot. ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am going to vomit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷ For you say, 'I'm rich; I have become wealthy and need nothing,' and you don't realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.

We need that faith that is looking and can see far West

Last buckshot-

Isaiah 9:6 For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

Matthew 2:16-18

Reflect on the Paradox that the Prince of Peace reigns among not apart, our Pain & Problems

- The angels proclaim peace on earth (Luke 2:14)
In Isaiah 11, the Messianic prophecy describes such peace that animals of prey lay down w/ predators
Yet Jesus' birth leads to upheaval, heartbreak and pain
- *Reflect:* Does this mean that our Prince of Peace is powerless? Is He inadequate? Is He metaphorical?
The pain and the problems, the slaughter of the innocents, are exactly why the Prince of Peace came to establish His rule among us;
- *Application:* here's what this means for us-

The agony we face is precisely where God wants to reveal His grace

Yes, this world is full of injustice- BEHOLD the King of justice

Yes, your life may be riddled with trauma- BEHOLD the one who endured trauma for you

Yes, your heart may be aching and broken in many pieces- BEHOLD the one who knit U 2gether

What could you possibly face in this life, that God cannot redeem?

Broken marriages are His workshop to shut the mouth of demons who shout "DIVIDE"

Aching Christians, physically agonizing, are God's instruments to show a proud world that He gives strength to the weak!

Wherever your point of agony is...there is God's hand putting pressure to the wound

I don't know who needs this but hear me closely:

**God was with you this past week when you felt like you had enough;
and God will march into this next week with you again, even into the pain**

Our agony is NOT evidence of God's absence; it is precisely WHY-HE-IS-PRESENT

Recap:

Glory in Obscurity
Faith over apathy
The Almighty in our agony

Christmas is beautiful not because everything is as it ought to be, but precisely because things are in disarray

MAIN TAKEAWAY:

**Whether this is a season of complaining or celebrating,
depends on whether we make time to contemplate Christ**

******CALL UP WORSHIP TEAM*

10 days left until Xmas morn-

CHALLENGE:

Take time daily to reflect on what God *has* done, *is* doing, and *can* do in your life

Write it down- Pray

Gospel Xplain & Invite

J.I. Packer- *The Almighty appeared on earth as a helpless human baby, needing to be fed and changed and taught to talk like any other child. The more you think about it, the more staggering it gets. Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as this truth of the Incarnation.*

BULPEN-

"A weak faith can receive a strong Christ." -Thomas Watson

The child born to Mary belonged to all

The Rejected Becomes the Cornerstone

- **Paradox:** There was no room for Mary and Joseph in the inn (Luke 2:7), yet the child born in obscurity becomes the foundation of salvation for all humanity (Psalm 118:22, Ephesians 2:20).

Matthew 6:21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

So many of us will get caught up in the chaos of the holidays and will find that Christmas passed us by but never settled in our hearts

We end up with anxious hearts because our hearts are on unstable things

Gift Giving

They brought to him perfume; He brought the very fragrance of heaven.

They brought him treasures; He treasured the givers more than the gifts.

They offered gifts; He offered Himself.

Shepherds came to him; He came to shepherd them.

During this Advent season, we are full of paradoxes ourselves:

Season of joy.... *we are stressed out of our minds*

Season of gratitude & giving... *our kids greediness comes out like no other time of the year*

Season of love... *we criticize, and we show contempt*

Season of worship.... *In all our preparations for xmas we didn't prepare our hearts to worship*

"The paradox of Christmas is that God's biggest gift to the world came in a small package. Instead of sending an army, he sent a baby. Instead of sending a warrior, he sent a child. Instead of sending a rich and powerful king, he sent a poor and feeble boy. God's rescue plan is unlike any other rescue plan ever devised. Victory would come through defeat. Glory would come through humility. Power would be displayed in weakness. God would come as a child."

2 Corinthians 9:15 Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Ephesians 2:8 For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Philippians 2:6-7 who, existing in the form of God,
did not consider equality with God
as something to be exploited.

⁷ Instead he emptied himself

by assuming the form of a servant,
taking on the likeness of humanity.

And when he had come as a man,

2 Corinthians 4:7-18 Now we have this treasure in clay jars, so that this extraordinary power may be from God and not from us. ⁸We are afflicted in every way but not crushed; we are perplexed but not in despair; ⁹we are persecuted but not abandoned; we are struck down but not destroyed. ¹⁰We always carry the death of Jesus in our body, so that the life of Jesus may also be displayed in our body. ¹¹For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus's sake, so that Jesus's life may also be displayed in our mortal flesh. ¹²So then, death is at work in us, but life in you. ¹³And since we have the same spirit of faith in keeping with what is written, **I believed, therefore I spoke,**^[b] we also believe, and therefore speak. ¹⁴For we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you. ¹⁵Indeed, everything is for your benefit so that, as grace extends through more and more people, it may cause thanksgiving to increase to the glory of God. ¹⁶Therefore we do not give up. Even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory. ¹⁸So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Matthew 2:1-18 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem, ²saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star at its rising and have come to worship him."

³When King Herod heard this, he was deeply disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴So he assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the people and asked them where the Messiah would be born.

⁵"In Bethlehem of Judea," they told him, "because this is what was written by the prophet:

⁶And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah: Because out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."

⁷Then Herod secretly summoned the wise men and asked them the exact time the star appeared. ⁸He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. When you find him, report back to me so that I too can go and worship him."

⁹After hearing the king, they went on their way. And there it was—the star they had seen at its rising. It led them until it came and stopped above the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹Entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and falling to their knees, they worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹²And being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another route.

¹³After they were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Get up! Take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. For Herod is about to search for the child to kill him." ¹⁴So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night, and escaped to Egypt. ¹⁵He stayed there until Herod's death, so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled: **Out of Egypt I called my Son.**

¹⁶Then Herod, when he realized that he had been outwitted by the wise men, flew into a rage. He gave orders to massacre all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, in keeping with the time he had learned from the wise men. ¹⁷Then what was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled:

¹⁸A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.

V1- "in the days of Herod" – uncertainty, oppression

V2- faith that searches

V2 they saw, v3 he heard- they saw because they were eagerly expecting/looking

He heard what God was doing from others

V3-6- Herod was hostile; priests and scribes were apathetic

V7- how did those closest miss it? But those far off recognize it?

V8- one king wouldn't leave his palace himself, the other did; one king loved his throne, the other his people

V9-10- Jesus=joy

V11-12- Wise men came with treasure in their hands and left with a greater treasure in their hearts