

“Gift ideas for Jesus ~ To be a SERVANT” 12.13.09

Can you recall the last time you were pleasantly surprised at Christmas time?

To the best of my recollection, it’s only happened twice in my adult life. The 1<sup>st</sup> time it occurred was in 1996.

- It was our 1<sup>st</sup> Christmas away from our family in TN; we were living in a drab apartment, just the 3 of us, at this point we were still unable to afford a home.
- As always Becky & Emilee were making the most out of our new space.
- The apartment was older, mid-town Tucson, dingy paint & thin-bare carpeting; old orange light fixtures that had been outdated for decades ☺
- To say I wasn’t quite in the Christmas spirit that season would be a gross understatement; I was HOMESICK for my family & anything familiar!
- Early in December we had just sat down for dinner when the doorbell rang; I went to the door & there were a group of strangers smiling & shouting ‘Merry Christmas!’
- Come to find out they were a youth group from another church in town. I had never met any of them until that night.
- Several weeks prior to that cool night in December, the youth group had decided to adopt a family in ministry that was outside of their own church family; they had raised money to SERVE our family & make all of us feel welcome.
- They had adopted us b/c I had been blessed to SERVE 1 of their brothers in Nashville, TN. Mid-shipman, Mark McMurray who had grown up in Tucson & married a young woman from my youth ministry.
- This youth group decorated our home, + filled our pantries with food, + brought gifts for each of us, & a gift certificate for a honey-baked ham!
- I’ve never felt more honored or loved @ Christmas time. Their GIFT of SERVICE blessed us in a manner that words still fail to describe!

Today we want to continue our conversation that we began last week: how do we re-engage an earlier Christmas tradition that has somehow been lost?

Jesus’ 1<sup>st</sup> birthday was celebrated by gifts being brought to Him, so our church family is considering how to re-capture this sacred-timeless practice.

Each week during Christmas, we are describing gifts that are suitable for our KING. This week’s gift idea? To be a SERVANT!

Today’s Bible story centers around a very humble man in the N.T. This gentleman is somewhat obscure; he never utters a single word in the Gospels. He was visited by angels on 3 different occasions. Again no questioning - - no hesitation; he simply listens & obeys!

A man of few words who simply SERVED GOD!

To be straight, we are never really told much concerning how this gentleman felt about the birth of Jesus except in Luke 2: 33 NIV

“The child’s father & mother marveled @ what was said about Him.”

Let’s turn to the story of JOSEPH...

I. JOSEPH ~ God’s man to protect & nurture His son!

A. Matthew 1: 18a

- Historically Jesus was born in chaotic times; in the 400 year period between the O.T. & N.T. the Greeks had conquered the Middle East & under the leadership of their great leader = Alexander the Great.
  - Alexander the Great conquered the 'known world' in 11 yrs.
  - Eventually the Roman Empire's military took the reigns of world dominance & controlled the known world for nearly 1,500 years.

& this was the CHAOTIC WORLD that Jesus was born in to, an occupied state dominated by intruders - - the cruel enemy forces of Rome.

#### B. Matthew 1: 18b

- In 1<sup>st</sup> Century Palestine an engagement was a serious contract between 2 families, NOT JUST 2 young people.
  - The engagement period lasted approximately 1 year to ensure that the bride was sexually pure = a virgin. After 12 months a perspective groom could validate whether or not his bride was w/ or w/out child.
  - If a young woman was found to be pregnant = her life was in danger!
  - Deuteronomy 22: 23 – 24 = 5<sup>th</sup> book in O.T.

#### C. Matthew 1: 18c – 19

- We sometimes romanticize the Scriptures unfairly, don't we?
  - I seriously doubt that Joseph calmly accepted Mary's news. Bible describes Joseph as a 'good man,' not someone w/out a heart-beat.
  - @ the very least he had to be confused & since he was human he was probably disappointed & angry.
    - Think about it = the angel had only visited Mary up until this point, he must have felt ignored that he was not included in this type of important news ~ that had this type of destructive consequences.
    - Although he felt betrayed by his bride to be - - Although ignored by God - - & ridiculed by his guy friends, Bible indicates, that JOSEPH stayed UNDER CONTROL!

#### D. How we RESPOND in a time of crisis reveals our true nature!

- When things are going smoothly, we are able to hide a lot that becomes clear in a crisis & Joseph was exceptional under unusual pressure.
  - Thankfully he did not crack or the story would be different today!
- Papa Clifford
  - The kindest - - most compassionate man I ever met was my mom's dad; he adopted her when she was only 3 yrs old.
  - My mom was born in 1937 to a single mom; my grandmother was only married for 6 months before she left her 1<sup>st</sup> husband ☹
  - My grandmother didn't know that this man was a bootlegger & gambler; all she knew was he was very handsome + big car + very clean.

- o Little granny didn't know she was pregnant when she left & went home to live with the stigma of divorce with her parents in the 30s.

In 1940 Papa Clifford came along ~ married Little granny & spoiled rotten my mother; I can't describe how much he did just for me.

Back to the text:

Most men would have left Mary & her baby boy leaving them poverty stricken; & no other man would have dared marry her.

E. Matthew 1: 20 a "as he considered his options"

- Deep down Joseph wasn't angry @ God nor was he angry with Mary; he just wanted to KNOW & UNDERSTAND what God was doing.

Why we pray & patiently wait upon Jesus ~ He never fails to answer!

F. Matthew 1: 20b – 25 = BEST NAP EVER ☺

- Finally it was all clear = when he got up from his nap, he now how his marching orders, not only was he going to marry Mary = I get to be the earthly protector & guardian of the SON of GOD; the blessed long-awaited MESSIAH.

Joseph quietly obeyed & served God w/his whole heart!

- INSERT Life is like a parade...

So, let's unpack our 2<sup>nd</sup> gift idea in practical terms: WHAT would it LOOK LIKE to BE a SERVANT this Christmas?

Let's change our approach I've helped create over the last several Christmas's: I've been much more concerned over the insensitivity of the politically correct stores calling Christmas trees = Holiday trees. I don't think Jesus gets stressed out over what we call trees they're His. He actually helped create them ☺

Really want to give Jesus a great gift for His birthday? Let's consider loving one another by SERVING THEM this year?

Here are a few ideas...

II. 7 practical ways to 'Be a Servant'

1. Instead of writing protest letters to the editor objecting to the various ways Christmas is being celebrated, write letters of love & hope to the soldiers far away from home. They are lonely & homesick; thank them for protecting us!
2. Visit someone in a nursing home. Chad & Cindy Walters go every Sunday @ 3:00 pm and share Jesus @ \_\_\_\_\_. You want to serve Jesus this year - - reach out to someone who is all by themselves.

Jesus said, "...when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers & sisters, you were doing it to Me." Matthew 25: 40

3. Instead of giving your children a lot of gifts you can't afford & they don't need, spend time with them. Tell them the story of Jesus = about how He was born; and why He

chose to leave Heaven and come down to earth. Make sure you tell them you love them!

4. Pick someone who has hurt you in the past and forgive him or her. That's an incredible gift you can give Jesus for His birthday!
5. Did you know that someone in your world will attempt to take his or her life this Christmas season because they feel all alone & hopeless? Since you don't know who that person is please pray that God would reveal anyone in your world that is contemplating suicide and reach out to them!
6. Here's a good one = BUY a GOAT; ask someone who just came back from Nairobi, Kenya how much a goat can change the entire course of a family. Becky & I are buying 3 herds of goats for my family; they only cost \$15.00; I'm already picking out names for my special goats 😊
7. Finally if you want to make a statement about your love for God & your loyalty to serving Jesus, then BEHAVE in a manner honoring to God! Don't do things in secret that you wouldn't do in God's presence. Let people know by your actions that you are one of God's beloved servants!

Jesus' birthday is quickly approaching ~ less than 12 days away 😊

Without a doubt = the best gift any of us could give is our CONFESSON that Jesus Christ is Lord & I accept Him as my Lord & Savior!