

## Christmas Eve 2023

Throughout this past year, we all have had our joys and struggles. Some of our experiences we have considered good news and blessings and others not. Tonight, we gather together to hear the story, maybe a few for the first time and for others, we may have lost count. What might the good news or blessings be in this old story?

This old story is about the birth of Jesus, the Messiah, our Messiah, God coming to earth to save us, God's people. It is easy to glamorize this story, but when we do that, we may miss the good news of the story. The time period that Jesus was born into was not an easy time. Transportation had not been developed and there were many laws or customs that were expected to adhere to.

When we begin to look at how Jesus' birth came to be, it rocked many boats. Mary was a teenager who had not had sex with Joseph, and they were not married. Mary's family could have disowned her, and Joseph could have told people that he was not the father. Was this conception good news and a blessing or was it a curse?

When the angel Gabriel came to tell Mary, of course Mary was asking, 'how could this be?'. I am a teenager and have not even been with a man. It seemed that when Gabriel told Mary that her aunt Elizabeth was also pregnant and she was quite old, Mary felt that she could affirm this conception as she would not be alone.

Since some of Mary's fears were allayed, she was able to reframe it. Mary was able to see this conception as a way to serve God. She really did not know what she was in for, but she was honored to be a servant for God. Mary looked at this as good news and a blessing. She sang a song of praise to let God know that she was joyful to be able to serve. Something that could have caused her to be stoned she reframed into a blessing, good news.

Then there is the census that caused them to have to travel. Could the census have been good news and a blessing? Our first thought could be that it caused a hardship for Mary and Joseph. As the census required them to go from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Remember Mary is pregnant. The distance is ninety miles and there were no cars. The story tells us that she rode on a donkey. Have many of us have walked ninety miles, let alone with someone who is pregnant?

Does this sound like good news, let alone a blessing? For us this would be like walking from Okemos to Holland or Grand Haven. The census was actually bringing them back to where Joseph grew up. This established Joseph as being in the line of David, which was foretold in the Old Testament to be where the

Messiah was coming from. When we can reframe the census, it can become good news and a blessing.

It gave Mary and Joseph a sense of belonging and status, which they may have been struggling with. It became good news and a blessing when this information came together. If they were going back to where Joseph grew up, they probably had family and friends around to support them. Thus, the census could be viewed as good news and a blessing.

So often we have heard of the angry motel keeper who wouldn't let Mary and Joseph into his motel. Jesus was placed in a manger, possibly then in a family room of a family member. What if placing Jesus in a manger was a provision for safety and security? Could this be looked at as good news and a blessing as God provided what they needed at the time? Again, reframing a situation that seemed to be of lack, but could also be seen as abundance.

As we can reframe these different parts of this familiar story, can we begin to see that even in what may seem like the darkest moments in our lives, that when we can reframe them, they may become good news and a blessing? In each situation in our Christmas story God provided what was needed. In each situation in our lives, can we see where God has provided what we needed at that time? This is good news and a blessing for us to share with others.

It also reminds us that God is always with God's people. Even in what may seem like our darkest moments in life, we can see God's love shown for us. God loves us enough to come to our messed up world and continues to show up and be with us and our stories into good news and blessings.

God provided for Mary, Joseph and Jesus throughout this old story. As our stories continue to unfold, God continues to provide for us. At times we may need to do some reframing in order to see God's presence in our stories. The good news and blessing is that God came to earth out of love and continues to love us by providing for us what we need, when we need it.

We have gathered to hear this old story again to be reminded that God walks with us in our stories continuing to love and provide for us. God continues to turn our dark moments into good news and blessings. This is the good news for us and the good news that we have to share with others.

Let us pray: Loving God, we have looked anew at the story of your Son's birth. The story tells of many challenges that Mary and Joseph had. A story that also shows your presence with them in many ways and providing what they needed when they needed it. A story that shows how your love for them allowed them to reframe challenges into good news and blessings. Help us tonight to be able to see the good news and blessings in our lives that you have given to us out of love. Help us to share the good news of your love and blessings with all people. Amen