

“Christmas and Love Go Together”

Luke 2:1-20

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In September, 1977, Jackie and I moved from Frankfort to Bowling Green, Kentucky where I became pastor of the Rich Pond Baptist Church. Now, preachers move all the time, so what was significant about this one? Jackie was six weeks away from giving birth to our second child, Amy Blair.

I am not sure she has forgiven me yet. You can imagine the hardships this imposed upon her. She had to say good bye to dear friends, pack our belongings, stand in receiving lines to greet new friends and act happy about doing all this. However, the most difficult adjustment was finding a new doctor to carry her through the rest of her pregnancy and help her give birth to Amy. Needless to say, this was not the most stress free time in our marriage.

Can you imagine the **conversation between Mary and Joseph** days before Jesus was born?

“Mary, how are you feeling?”

“I am tired, Joseph, but I know that in a matter of days my baby will be born and then I’ll feel much better. It is just nice to be able to relax in my home and rest until Jesus comes.”

“Mary, I need to talk to you about that. It seems we need to take a trip.”

“What kind of trip are you talking about, Joseph? Is this a business trip? Do you need to go to a carpenter’s convention? If so, you can make this one without me. I am in no shape to travel.”

“Well, actually I do need you to go with me. We need to go to Bethlehem.”

“Now Joseph, can’t we go see your family after the baby is born? Surely they will understand.”

“Mary, this is not about seeing family, it is about registering as a family. You see, Caesar has ordered that a census be taken and we must go to Bethlehem to register.”

“Joseph, you sound serious. Tell me you are not serious.”

“Don’t worry, Mary, I’ll make it as comfortable for you as possible. I’ll even put two blankets on the donkey!”

And so, Mary and Joseph made that trek to Bethlehem and as you would expect, Jesus was born while they were on their journey. You know the story. There was no room for them in the inn, so Jesus was born in a stable and laid in a manger. What a trip! What a strong and courageous lady Mary must have been.

What’s the message for us this morning, three days from Christmas? It is this. Doing God’s will, for the most part, is not going to be easy. It wasn’t for Mary and it won’t be for us.

Why is it sometimes difficult to follow God? God wants to use us to make the world better. The world is not what He intended for it to be when He created it and He cannot ignore this or become indifferent about it. He loves the world too much to let it go. And so, He uses people, ordinary people like Mary, Joseph, you and me to be change agents and turn the world around.

So what does this mean? What kind of things does He want us to do? He wants us to reach out to those who are hurting and ease their pain. He wants us to embrace those who are different and accept them. He wants us to share our resources with those that are struggling and help them. He wants us to forgive those who have hurt us and build bridges of reconciliation. He wants us to be good role models and discipline ourselves to say no to unhealthy things and yes to those that are good for us. He wants us to pursue peace and justice and find ways to turn enemies into friends. He wants us to be wise and responsible stewards by being honest and disciplined. He wants us to be faithful mates and loving parents that believe nothing is more important than well being of our children.

I think you understand now why following God will not be easy. In the words of Robert Frost and Scott Peck, this is truly the road less traveled.

Why would we do it? Why would we travel down this road? Why did Mary and Joseph do the difficult? They loved and trusted God. And never forget, love is willing to do the difficult.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” John 3:16. That’s Christmas love at its best. That’s all the motivation Mary needed to ride a donkey for one hundred miles when she was days away from having a baby. Surely it is enough for us, too.