

12/24/11

That Crazy Family of Yours #5 – Christmas has Always Been Crazy

- how many of you would say that the last few weeks have been crazy for you?...
 - there's the challenge of trying to get everything ready for however you celebrate the holidays...
 - you're probably traveling, or having guests into your home...
 - there's all the stress of shopping and cooking and cleaning...
 - many of you have also been serving faithfully at our church...but that takes time...
 - then there are all these political things occurring around us...
 - arguments about Right to Work legislation...the death of the leader of North Korea...
 - the Senate and the House haggling about payroll tax relief...
 - all kinds of activity in preparation for next year's election...
 - it just feels crazy in a lot of ways...
- tonight I'd like to point out that...**Christmas Has Always Been Crazy...**
 - but there are definitely ways to handle the challenges with grace...
- I don't generally announce the passage I'm speaking from at our Christmas Eve Candlelight service because people can't see their Bibles anyway...
 - however, since so many people just look off their smart phones anymore, let me tell you that we're going to be reading from Luke chapter 2 in just a moment...
- this smart phone business has put pastors in an interesting predicament...
 - now, I don't know if people are following along in their Bibles or checking their e-mail, watching a football game, or who knows what...
 - there's also the issue of how we used to tell people that you can tell a lot about a church by standing at the door and seeing if people are carrying their Bibles with them – because if they don't need their Bibles, that's probably not a good sign...
 - of course young people respond to that with – that is so 1970...I have my Bible on my phone...
- this Christmas we've been talking about **That Crazy Family of Yours...**
 - now, I realize you might say – PV – we have Uncle Frank with us tonight...we made him take his Rudolf's nose off before we came in the church house – but he has it out in the car...so dial down the title of the series we've been doing...
 - the point of all of this has been to simply acknowledge that this time of year brings special challenges...but we haven't been poking fun at everyone else in the family...we've been poking fun at ourselves...and wondering we get so wound up about some of the things we get so wound up about...
- tonight we want to read a passage of Scripture that shows that the first Christmas night was crazy busy too – but it was transformed into what one of the greatest Christmas hymns of all times refers to as a Silent Night...
- read Luke 2:1-20...

Luke 2:1-20 - Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And everyone was on his way to register for the

census, each to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child. While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. "This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased." When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us." So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

- let's break this passage down and look for 3 principles to help us face the busyness and pressure that comes with this time of year.

I. Many Times Craziness is Intensified by the Choices of Unreasonable People.

- the text says that on...

A. The first Christmas

- all of these events unfolded because of the decree of Caesar Agustus...
- Luke 2:1-20 - Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth.
- that's a rather comprehensive project...and of course that meant everyone living under Roman rule but that certainly encompassed a significant territory...
- so an attempt was going to be made to account for every human being in the Roman empire...
- and you understand that the purpose was not to be sure that the number was correct on the road signs leading into various entry points to the Roman Empire..."you are now entering the Roman Empire...population 12 million...."
- a government generally took a census for one of two reasons...
 - to be sure that everyone was being taxed...
 - to account for who might be available for military service...
- that's why some of us who learned this passage in the King James version of the Bible remember it being translated as...there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be....taxed...or registered...
- now, how was that done?...

- did they send you a self-addressed 3 x 5 card in the mail and you listed the names and ages of everyone in your household and send it back by return mail?...
- please tell me you just went on line and updated the information...or that it was synced to your FB account?...
- no actually here's the way it worked – you had to go back to the city of your husband's origin...
- and not by plane, train, or automobile...how about walking...or maybe a nice extended ride on a donkey?...
- and forget turning up the heater or popping a DVD in everybody's individual player to keep the kids occupied...
- the point is that the first Christmas was shaping up to be pretty crazy simply because of the decisions of a politician who wasn't particularly concerned for the convenience of his citizens...

- what about for you?

B. Your Christmas

- there are a lot of things happening right now that make your head spin around...
- like...

1. Warring politicians.

- and the reason I raise that is because sometimes I think we make the mistake of believing that politics is a recent invention...
- the truth is – Jesus was born into a culture and a time that was rich with political intrigue...and you better believe that especially Jewish people who were being forced to make a trip like this because of the Roman occupiers would have had strong opinions about what was occurring...
- and we live with that same kind of political pressure as well...you can hardly turn on the news without hearing about...
 - school voucher legislation...
 - the threat of another government shut down...
 - one political party walking out if they don't get their way...
 - whether the president wants to anger the environmentalists by approving a pipeline from Canada that would simultaneously please the unions and on and on...it's crazy...

2. Unprecedented pressures at work.

- Many who will hear this message tonight are facing incredible challenges at work...
- where you're being asked to do more with fewer resources by persons in management that don't seem to understand how impossible their requests and demands sometimes are...
- and then you throw in...

3. Imperfect family members.

- and that's the sweetest way I could think of to say that...
- but when you still all of this up – there's no question that we all face Christmas craziness in part because some of the people around us make requests or demands that are just unreasonable...just like on the first Christmas night...
- but there's more than that...we also have to face the fact that...

II. Sometimes God's Plan Includes Taking what Appears to be Craziness to the Very Brink.

- please think about this from Mary's perspective...

- she's received the news several months before that she will give birth to a child who was conceived of the Holy Spirit...
- and remember, she's a young girl – in her teens...
- and she had to discuss all of this with the young man she's engaged to...
- and they had to deal with whatever was said publically about them...
- and then she has all the normal pain and difficulties and challenges that come with being pregnant...
- and the uncertainty of what it will be like to give birth to the Messiah...
- would we agree that that's pretty close to overload right there?...
- and then Joseph shows up, who's heard the news about the census, and says...Mary, dear...are you in the mood for an...extended donkey ride?...

- and we can't just pass all of that off on the choices of unreasonable people...
- God Himself had ordained hundreds of years before that His Son would be born in Bethlehem...(chief priests and scribes to Herod) - **Matthew 2:5-6 - They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet: 'AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH, ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH; FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.' "**

- see, at some point we also have to factor in the sovereign hand of our God who allowed this census to occur at this very moment...meaning that Bethlehem would be unusually crowded that night and that Mary and Joseph would be forced to stay with the animals because there was no room for them in the Inn...
- so it wasn't an accident or a last minute thought—it had been planned hundreds of years in advance...
- the apostle Paul would later write that God... **Ephesians 1:11 - ...works all things after the counsel of His will.**

- so all of the cultural and political issues swirling around us right now – we can't get around the fact that our God has allowed us to face these issues...
- and the challenges taking place in the economy and at work...
- and then all the issues that occur when your family members get together...

- and I realize that there are some who will be with us tonight who have gone through a season of significant trials this year...
- it's not craziness...it's craziness in part that God has allowed to occur...
- that was clearly true for Mary and Joseph and it's true for you and me as well...

- so where does that leave us?...understanding that...

III. Submitting to God's Plan Brings Quiet to a Crazy World.

- the whole scene switches from a loud, busy, crowded city to a quiet hillside...
- where God announces the birth of His Son not to the powerful people down in the city...but to the poor, outcast shepherds...
- and they come and find Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus lying in a manger...
- and they brought the confirmation from the Word of God that Mary desperately needed...
- and it's fascinating how the passage ends...
- **Luke 2:19 - But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart.**

- rejoicing in the fulfilled promise of the Savior has a way of drowning out the craziness...
- so when's something's not going your way politically – that doesn't have to monopolize your thinking...
 - If God loved you enough to send you His Son...that's all we need to have, and that's all we need to know...
- and if our economic well being is threatened – if God can accomplish His plan through poor shepherds...he could accomplish His plan through us even if our possessions and lifestyle were reduced...
- and if that family of yours is being a bit crazy...
 - remember...that's part of God's sovereign plan for you...really...
 - and if God gave young Mary the strength and grace to handle her Christmas craziness with quiet, Christ-centered dignity...He can do the same for you and me...