

Hope

Introduction

- Christmas/Advent Series
 - Series NOT some veiled attempt to 'cheer you up' if you are down, or about the need for everyone to always be cheerful, because let's be honest, nobody's cheerful all the time!
 - This series is about the fact that while our external circumstances may become awful - like the circumstances of 1st century Jews - God's mind-boggling decision to come and dwell among us through the birth of Jesus was a Game Changer. A Game Changer that SHOULD and CAN - in fact - bring about a significant shift in our internal circumstances so that the result is HOPE, and peace and calm.
 - Despite our external circumstances, We CAN become like Jesus in Mark 4:37 where A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat that Jesus and the Disciples were in, so that it was nearly swamped. **All the while, while the Disciples were freaking out, Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion**
 - The first-century, middle-eastern world was like that boat caught up in a storm. So Jesus - left all that was bright and beautiful and came to earth not for a pleasant change of scenery, but to bring Light, because the world was broken and in need and darkness surrounded God's people
 - Jesus - the Light - came:

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Isaiah 60:1 - 1 "Arise, shine, for your light has come..."

Tension:

- Do you have the Light? How is your 'hope' supply this morning?
- Without Jesus there is no hope (Repeat)
 - And yet Some would say they 'have Jesus' but are still struggling with hopelessness...why is that?
- Hope is something we all need in order to survive

Worship Note: Hope is the ability to see a path to the **future**; that there is a possibility to reach a future that is **better** than the present.

OUR Hope is found in **Matthew 1:18-21**

18 This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.

- Cornerstone belief - Mary with child, result of activity of the Holy Spirit
 - **Luke 1:34-35** ³⁴“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” ³⁵The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. (He will be holy)

19 Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

- Joseph’s Character

20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

- The angel’s words, “Do not be afraid...” are timeless in their ability to impart Hope. The original Greek word used here for ‘being afraid’ or fear is “*phobeo*”, the basis of the word phobia – a fear that incapacitates. When faced with an unexpected and undesired turn of events, Joseph didn’t allow his fear to be incapacitating or debilitating – it didn’t weaken or hinder him or prevent him from living into the future that God had for him.
- Joseph’s encounter with the Divine gave him the ability to believe that there was a future that was **better** than his present circumstance. His external circumstances

didn't change - Mary was still pregnant prior to their wedding, and there was going to be some fallout from those circumstances, but his internal circumstances changed quite a bit, as HOPE came to reside within him.

21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, [1] because he will save his people from their sins."

Jesus' purpose from birth and Jesus' destiny was that He would come to save people from their sins. The world needed Jesus. The world needed saving. And Jesus - the Light - was born into a dark world, made clear in various passages, including **Matthew 2:13**:

13 When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

Frederick Buechner: "For all his enormous power, Herod knew there was somebody in diapers more powerful still..."

Welcome to the world! *Run for your lives!*

Herod has all of the male babies 2 and under in Bethlehem and surrounding area killed...and as one scholar states, "the Bethlehem toddlers become the first martyrs of the gospel." · The kind of evil displayed by Herod is the kind of evil that Jesus came to disrupt and conquer...

Bottom Line - you want hope? you need Jesus. He is the Light. He is our hope.

John 1: 4-5, 9-11 4 In him [Jesus] was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

9 The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world

did not recognize him. 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

Have you Recognized & Received Jesus?

Hope comes from Recognizing and Receiving Jesus.

Worship Note: Hope comes from Recognizing and Receiving Jesus.

- If your external circumstance are defining your internal circumstance, you may yet to Recognize & Receive Jesus...
- You can 'Recognize' someone but not really know him or her.
- Recognition is the beginning of Knowledge.
- Knowing leads to Receiving.
 - Can be around someone or something and not really know it
 - For those who would claim to 'have' Jesus but still struggle with hopelessness, it's worth considering the question: Do you recognize the name of Jesus, or do you Recognize the Person of Jesus? "Do you 'know about Jesus' or do you 'Know Jesus'?"
 - Big Difference between watching the SEC championship game on TV, verses being at the game
 - Even greater difference between being at the game, and playing in the game!
 - Big difference in the level of experience or intimacy with regards to the game
 - That type of difference is demonstrative of the varying levels of experience with or knowledge of or intimacy with the Person of Jesus Christ.

Once you have been in the presence of Jesus and known the Person of Jesus, and His Unconditional Love for you, and Received Him as Savior and Lord, you can close your eyes and enter His presence and the external no longer is able undo the internal in ways that it has before, because Light and Hope have taken up residence where the Darkness used to reside.

I don't know all that you are going through. But I do know this. The God who gave us his own Son, did so in such a way, that we would know that HE knows what it is like to try to live in this sometimes difficult world. Jesus understands exactly what we're going through, because he has been there: Your circumstances may include:

- *Physical Pain:* Untimely sickness or chronic illness, and even death

- Jesus understands. The One who was born like any other baby, became a man who bleeds like any other human being.
- **“Jesus has been there; Let Jesus be your hope”**
- *Circumstantial Pain:* Job loss, poverty, loneliness, broken dreams, financial abundance in an unhappy house, a victim of crime, a house fire, or incarceration.
 - No room at the inn, born among the cattle, thrown into a refugee life by a divine dream in the night-watches.
 - **“Jesus has been there; Let Jesus be your hope”**
- *Cultural Pain:* Political, social, racial, sexual, ethnic, religious fears, and wounds.
 - Born an ethnic minority, with no political power, blue collar, despised by Samaritans, handled by Romans. All, while Pharisees and Sadducees, Essenes and Zealots, tax collectors, Caesars and Herodians, shouted a conflict of voices that ravaged a generation in the name of blessing it.
 - **“Jesus has been there; Let Jesus be your hope”**
- *Soul Pain:* Depression, anxiety, estrangement from God, loss of faith, skepticism, unbelief, guilt for feeling these ways at Christmas; envy or bitterness for having troubles when everyone else seems blessed.
 - Born to become One who would grieve, cry out, sweat like blood, and give voice to the most ancient of human questions among those who suffer. **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”** (Matt. 27:46).
 - **“Jesus has been there; Let Jesus be your hope”**
- *Familial Pain:* Living at a distance from loved ones, divorce arrangements, estranged relationships, silent treatments, affairs, the absence of repentance and forgiveness, verbal and physical misuse, condemnation and misunderstanding, impatience, substance abuse and damage, foster parents and children.
 - Born as One whose family was a scandal which stayed fresh in the minds of critics (Matt. 1:19; John 8:41). One who in time could be misunderstood by parents (Luke 2:48-49), mischaracterized by siblings (Mark 3:21), betrayed by friends (Luke 22:48; John 16:32).
 - **“Jesus has been there; Let Jesus be your hope”**

Every fellow friend in the Christmas story, whether it was Simeon or Anna, Mary or Joseph, the shepherds or the Magi, the oppressed under Herod or the oppressed under Rome, even Jesus himself; they all experienced what it meant to encounter soul-ravaging and joy-crushing evils

and pains. Their hope found anchor in deeper places and so can yours. Your greatest hope this Christmas isn't the absence of your wounds. Your greatest hope is the presence of Jesus.

Recognize & Receive Him, and may your internal circumstances not be impacted by your external circumstances because HOPE resides within.

Closing

Take time to bring every circumstance to Jesus, and to Recognize & Receive Jesus...