



northchurch

Group Discussion Guide

Found in the Mayhem

Sunday, December 4, 2011

Read

Read aloud through the story found in Luke 2:1-20. Go around the circle in the group with each person reading a verse until you're done.

Discuss

Joseph and Mary definitely experienced a level of *mayhem* on the first Christmas! Delivering a baby away from home and family support, in a stable with farm animals for company -- do you think they lost sight of what God had told them about this child? In our own holiday mayhem of parties, shopping, cooking, travel and visitors, what challenges have you personally faced remembering what God has told you about this child (Jesus)? Have you found anything that helps you keep Jesus central to Christmas?

The Godly people of Bethlehem missed what God was doing on the first Christmas – they were too busy, and the inn was full. They didn't have eyes to see what was really going on; they had a vague hope of what God might do in the distant future (a messiah), but they weren't expecting God to break into history – not here, not now – and certainly not in a stable. We can be just as apt to miss God's work in our own lives. How would you describe your own expectancy of God's presence and action in your life? Does your expectancy lean more toward vague and distant, or present and immediate? Why?

God certainly surprised Mary & Joseph (and the Jewish people) with his methods – having the messiah be born as a carpenter's son, in the lowly conditions of a stable. The Jews longed to see God show up, just as he had showed up in their history. They craved his presence, but they were critical of his methods. Jesus was from the wrong side of the tracks. "Can anything good come out of Galilee?" they asked. In a similar way, most Christians crave God's presence – but are we critical of his methods? Have you ever expected God to act one way, and then were totally surprised by what he actually did? How did you respond? How did it affect your relationship with God?

Pray

Reserve at least the last 15 minutes of group time to pray for the things that came up during your discussion and any other prayer needs.

Here's some background information:

Luke 2:1-20 English Standard Version (ESV)

1 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. **2** This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. **3** And all went to be registered, each to his own town. **4** And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, **5** to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

6 And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. **7** And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

8 And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. **9** And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. **10** And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. **11** For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. **12** And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." **13** And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

***14** "Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those
with whom he is pleased!"*

15 When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." **16** And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. **17** And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. **18** And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. **19** But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. **20** And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

About Luke 2:1-20

(from IVP NT Commentaries)

If ever there was an opportunity for God to enact his plan with a majestic flourish, it was at Jesus' birth. But God did not presume upon humanity when he stepped in to redeem it. There was no pretense in this arrival. Rather, God chose to identify in the humblest way with those made in his image.

Its contrast to the birth of John the Baptist is remarkable. John's birth was announced in the capital, at the temple, in the center of the Jewish nation. But Jesus arrives in rural anonymity. John is the child of a priest; Jesus belongs to Jews of average social status.

Yet it is Jesus' birth that draws an angelic host. Once again, appearances are deceiving. As humble as the setting is, his birth is accompanied by the attention of the

heavenly host. The shepherds who are privileged to share in the moment become bearers of a story full of wonder. Jesus' birth is more than a cosmic event; it is the arrival of divine activity that should provoke joy, reflection and attentiveness. That is why Mary ponders these events and the shepherds return glorifying God.

A regional *census* leads Joseph and his betrothed, Mary, to the city of David, better known as the hamlet of Bethlehem. Nazareth to Bethlehem was about a ninety-mile trip, assuming that Samaria was bypassed. Such a journey would have taken around three days.

That Bethlehem is *the town of David* indicates the birth's connection to promise (Micah 5:1-2; the Greek is literally "city of David"). As the

couple arrives in the city, the time comes for the child's arrival.

In all likelihood, the manger is an animal's feeding trough, which means the family is in a stable or in a cave where animals are housed. Swaddling clothes were cloth wrapped around the baby's arms and legs (see Ezekiel 16:4); they kept the limbs covered and protected.

The contrast between the birth's commonness and the child's greatness could not be greater. The promised one of God enters creation among the creation. The profane decree of a census has put the child in the promised city of messianic origin. God is quietly at work, and a stable is Messiah's first throne room.