

The R's of Advent: Routine Mathew 1: 18-25

In our lifetime we have heard this wonderful old story over of the birth of Christ dozens of times. In fact, some of us have heard it so many times that we tend to take for granted the incredible miracles that marked the single event that changed the world in which we live forever. It is a Christmas tradition to sing the same Christmas carols year after year and watch the same pageants, plays and television shows that tell the story. Christmas would not be Christmas without Hark the Herald Angels Sing, Silent Night, It's a Wonderful Life, A Charlie Brown Christmas and of course my favorite, A Christmas Story, of all places filmed in Cleveland Ohio. Certainly, tradition is good, especially for the younger people and others who may not know the Christmas story. But if we are not careful, we can become so familiar with it all that we no longer are amazed by the mystery of it all. Because we are creatures of habit, people governed by our routines, our day to day activities often cause us to miss the signs and wonders that God gives us to reveal His glory. When we do things the same way over and over, our mind ceases to question the need for the activity, and instead simply tells the rest of our body to just do it. Doing things without thinking is rarely good, and eventually it will cause us to stumble. It is far too easy to underestimate the significance of Jesus coming to earth for the first time.

Christmas is much more than a story, it is part of God's plan for our lives. The birth of Christ was the first of many miracles meant to reveal to the world that Jesus is God, the One who created us to serve Him and do good things. More than just a great teacher, more than just a great prophet, at Christmas we are celebrating the fact that Jesus is God Almighty, God in human flesh, born without sin, born a child yet a King. This evening it is my hope that God will interrupt our routines so that we might hear God's voice just as Mary and Joseph and the shepherds did when they first heard the Christmas story.

Mathew and Luke both provide a written record of the birth of Christ, each told from a different perspective. Luke's Gospel provides many of the details that inquiring minds need to know, like the time, date and details of how it happened. His main purpose was to provide an "orderly account" of the life of Jesus Christ and show that He came into the world to redeem humankind.

Mathew provides no clues as to when, where or how it happened but he does provide some significant information we shouldn't overlook. For instance, he provides a glimpse into the struggle that Joseph had through this amazing event. Just as Luke revealed much about Mary's thoughts and prayers, Mathew does the same for Joseph. He tells us the Joseph was "a just man" and had fears about marrying the woman he had promised to love and support. What was he afraid of? Mathew doesn't tell us, but it is reasonable to conclude that it was a fear of God. If he took Mary as his wife, he would have to deceive those around them into believing that the child was his. Character and integrity meant something to him.

Joseph's part in the birth of Christ is often overshadowed by Mary's. He is often overlooked, and sometimes considered an innocent bystander at best. However, he had questions and fears just as Mary did. God chose him to be the surrogate father of Christ, just as he chose Mary to be Jesus' mother. God allows nothing to happen by chance, or by mere routine. God sent an angel to both to alleviate their fears and provide guidance and direction. Both would also have their lives changed forever by their encounter with the Christ. Though the messengers were different, the message was the same. Fear not, for Jesus has come to bring light and love into a world filled with darkness and hate. The virgin birth of Jesus was truly a sign that God is real.

Fear not, for the God of miracles, signs and wonders is also the God of love. His name is Jesus, and He is just as real as you and I. That is good news, because real people like us need a real Jesus like Him to overcome our fear, sadness and doubt. They will steal our joy from us this Christmas season if allow Christmas to become a routine rather than a relationship. So, in this holy season, let us interrupt those routines and expect something different. Let us open our eyes and see something new, let us open our ears and hear something new, let us open our souls and experience something new. Let us open our minds to a new routine, loving others as Jesus loves us. Amen