

“The Message, Miracle, and Joy of Christmas.”

Every year at Christmas, we are reminded that God came to earth in human form. In the Bible, in the Gospels, Jesus appears at three distinct times during his life.

His first appearance was as a newborn baby, who attracted the attention of nearby shepherds who came to visit him — and that’s what we’re about today — but also “wise men from the East” traveled many miles to see him.

His next appearance was as a teenager in the Temple in Jerusalem, talking with the religious leaders and teachers, and amazing them with his knowledge and maturity.

And finally, he appears in the Bible as an adult, who traveled throughout the country teaching, preaching, and healing.

In most ways, he was as ordinary a human being as you or me. But the things he said and did were, sometimes, really extraordinary. For example, And Jesus would say things like:

“If you’ve seen me, then you’ve seen God”;

and

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,
bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse
you.”

In fact, sometimes his message was *so* radical that people just *had* to stop and listen. And it was at times like those that people realized that there was something more going on in this carpenter from Nazareth; that God was doing something new in and through this son of Mary.

But Jesus was not the first person in the Bible through whom God did his work. In fact, our Bible describes how God has worked in and through many, *many* people. But the thing is, so many of them were the last people you would expect God to enlist.

For example:

If you never thought that God would work in and through a pagan idol-worshiper, you've never heard of Gideon.

If you never thought that God would work in and through a foreigner and prostitute, then you've never heard of Rahab.

If you never thought that God would work in and through someone who was a murderer and an adulterer, then you've never heard of King David.

If you never thought that God would work in and through a womanizing drunk, then you've never heard of Samson.

If you never thought that God would work in and through a narrow-minded bigot, then you've never heard of St. Paul.

And, finally, if you never thought that God would work in and through an unwed, pregnant teenage girl, then you've never heard of Mary.

You see, the fact is, there is practically no one in whom and through whom God cannot, and will not, work. And, each year at Christmas, we are reminded that God can even work through a newborn baby.

You see, because of Christmas, we can never look at another person in quite the same way again.

Because of Christmas, we are reminded that there exists within every person, a world of infinite possibility, and potential.

Because of Christmas, we are assured that God can do some of his best work even through people like us.

And because of Christmas, we are reminded us that: everyone is *useful* to God, everyone is *valued* by God, and everyone is *loved* by God.

In fact, one of the messages of Christmas is this:

that God comes to us through *lots* of different people — even, and sometimes especially, through those we least expect.

And another message of Christmas is this:

that God reaches out to others — sometimes to those whom we don't think deserve it — through people like us.

“God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son...” These words were written by John the Evangelist nearly 2,000 years ago. And 2,000 years later God still loves the world, and so he sends people like you and me *into* the world. And in the end, not only is this the message of Christmas, it's also the miracle of Christmas, and it's the joy of Christmas.

God love you. God bless you. And may God grant you a very merry Christmas.

Amen.