

Advent 2020

It's Your Choice

Everything is different in 2020 and Advent is no different. Advent in a Box, an outdoor Christmas gathering on December 12, our annual Christmas Eve service will be online only. It's all different. The truth, as you well know, is that sometimes we get handed situations we didn't ask for, circumstances we didn't plan on and that we just don't like. But there is still good news if we know where to look and that's what we are going to focus on during Advent 2020. The good news this morning has to do with choices. God gives us an opportunity to choose to obey Him, to find his plan and his purpose in it all, to find the joy, the good news in it all. Regardless of the circumstances, we still have the power to choose. I want to talk about the importance of choices and their powerful consequences in the story of the first Christmas.

Mary had a choice. Church tradition suggests Mary was a young girl, a teenager faced with a decision with powerful consequences. Her story is found in Luke 1. **“In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, ‘Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.’ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.’ ‘How can this be,’ Mary asked the angel, ‘since I am a virgin?’ The angel answered, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon 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...For nothing is impossible with God.’ ‘I am the Lord’s servant,’ Mary answered. ‘May it be to me as you have said.’ Then the angel left her.” Luke 1:26-38**

Mary had a choice to make. God didn't force his will on Mary. He chose her, but she still had to choose. She had to decide if she was willing to say yes to God's plan. Think about what this would mean for her. Planning to be married to Joseph and now... a pregnancy! What would Joseph think? What would her family think? What would his family think? What about her reputation? Who would believe she was pregnant by a miracle of God? She was facing

whispers, ridicule and scorn from the town and perhaps from her family. Would Joseph break their engagement? Would the elders condemn her? The risk was great, yet in spite of all these negative possibilities, Mary said yes. “May it be to me as you have said.” Mary could have refused, but she chose to say yes to the plan and purpose of God for her life and her obedience to God led to life and salvation for all of us! Her choice had powerful consequences!

A simple yes to God can result in powerful consequences. Your choice matters. Your choice to obey God can have powerful consequences for you and for others in your life. Mary chose God’s way even though Luke would tell us it meant a sword would pierce her own soul. Even though it meant watching her son die on a cross for our salvation, she chose God’s way and it proved to be the best way. Are you willing to say yes to God today? It’s good news. You have a choice and your choice, your yes to God, can result in powerful consequences.

Joseph had a choice. His side of the story is told in Matthew 1. **“This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. 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. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins...’ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.” Matthew 1:18-25**

It’s no small thing that’s being asked of Joseph. He finds himself engaged to a woman who is carrying a child that’s not his. What would his friends and family think? How did Joseph feel? How would you feel? Betrayed, doubtful, hurt? Joseph too, like Mary, would face scorn and alienation, suspicion that perhaps he was the father. Mary’s dad must have wanted to go after Joseph at first. Either she was unfaithful and why would he marry her, or he was a cad and should be condemned for getting her pregnant. Mary’s story was just too outlandish, but in spite of all the whispers and stares and questions, in spite of this huge responsibility being laid on Joseph, to raise someone else’s child, Joseph chose to obey the Lord. Joseph said yes.

Obedience to God is a choice! Joseph could have walked away. “Not my child, not my problem. You’re on your own Mary. You got yourself into this, you can get yourself out.” Instead, Joseph chose the harder, better path. He chose God’s way. He said yes to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, yes to the instruction of the angel in the dream. He chose to be a provider of and protector of the Holy family, of Mary and Jesus. He took them safely to Egypt and then back to Nazareth when he knew it was safe to return where he worked and provided for his family. Joseph made a choice to obey God!

The bible says Joseph was a righteous man. Tradition says he was older than Mary and died by the time Jesus started his public ministry. But Joseph was there in Jesus’ growing up years, still saying yes to the purpose of God, still choosing to serve God and his family everyday. He and Mary took Jesus to be circumcised on the eighth day according to the law and Joseph named him Jesus. As Jesus was growing up, they took him to Jerusalem for the Passover. They took him to the temple when he was 12 for his Bar Mitzvah. Joseph was responsible for teaching the law to Jesus, handing down God’s word from father to son, from one generation to the next. Jesus was known among the folks in Nazareth as the carpenter’s son. It is easy to believe that Joseph taught Jesus the trade of a carpenter. He chose to lay a foundation for Jesus.

Maybe you’ve been asked to be faithful over a hard thing. You have to choose. You’ve been tasked with something you thought wasn’t really fair. You’ve been given a responsibility you never asked for or sought, but somehow God chose you. He knew you could handle it. You have to make a choice. Choose to say yes to God’s plan, to his purpose, to his call. Choose to say yes and be faithful in obeying the Lord. Remember: **Faithful choices have powerful consequences.** What a difference it made for Mary and Jesus and Joseph that Joseph chose to obey God and said yes!

There are others in the Christmas story that made choices. **The Magi had a choice.** They could have ignored the signs, ignored the star, but instead they said yes to the leading of the Holy Spirit that led them to Bethlehem and to Jesus. There may be some signs in your life that the Lord is using to draw you to himself. You have a choice to make. Don’t ignore the signs. Choose to say yes to the Lord as he calls you to himself and to a place of surrender and obedience. Choose to follow him.

The shepherds had a choice. The angels said “good news, a Savior is born in Bethlehem.” They even described him, wrapped in cloths and in a manger, but the angels didn’t

tell them to go find the baby. The angel just announced the good news of the birth. The shepherds decided to go see for themselves. The shepherds made a choice. You have a choice to make. “Let’s go see”. Chose to go see what the Lord is doing, what he is saying, what he has prepared for you. Embrace his plan. The shepherds took the trouble to go see and then they left and spread the word of the Savior born in Bethlehem. You have a choice, to make the effort to go see and then choose to spread the word about Jesus, about his saving grace. Who knows how many people were reached as the shepherds spread that good news. **Godly choices can have far reaching consequences.** You know who else made a choice in the Christmas story?

Jesus made a choice. He didn’t have to come to earth to give his life for us. Jesus made a choice. Jesus said, **“The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.” John 10:17-18** What extraordinary love. What a choice! Jesus chose to be born, to live, to die, for us, giving his life as a ransom for us. It was his choice. He could have called 10,000 angels to deliver him from crucifixion, but he made a choice to die in order to redeem us from sin and give us eternal life. Thank God that Jesus made that choice, to obey the Father, to love us and give himself for us. **Obedient choices produce redemptive consequences.** I challenge you to say yes to God, to obey God and make obedient choices and watch God redeem you and your circumstances! If you’ll say yes to Him and His will, He will put you on a path to healing and wholeness, to redeem what the enemy has stolen and destroyed in your life.

God the Father made a choice. And what a choice he made. **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” John 3:16-17** God chose to give his Son for us and notice it wasn’t for the best version of us. No, the bible says, **“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8** He chose to love us, to redeem us, to forgive us, to give his Son for us. The power of a godly choice!

Christmas reminds us of the power of a right choice! God chose to love you and he is giving you a choice today, on this first Sunday of Advent, to choose him, to say yes to him, to his salvation, to his plan and purpose for your life. **The choice is simple but the consequences are eternal.** Choose to turn to Jesus today. Believe that he died on the cross for you, that he bore your sin and the penalty for your sin in his own body. If you will believe in him, confess your

sins and ask him to forgive you, he will save you and give you eternal life, a new life. It may be a simple prayer you pray, but the consequences of that prayer are eternal. Eternal life!

He is calling you to make a choice. Today is your day to say yes to Jesus, to say yes to all he has in store for you. There is grace available for you today. Think about Mary. It seems impossible but it can happen because of God's grace. (Hail Mary, highly favored – full of grace). Saying yes to the impossible requires his grace and his grace is sufficient to help you. It starts by making the choice. It starts by saying yes to him. **“May it be to me as you have said.”** Choosing Jesus and a life of obedience to God is always the right choice!

Join me in choosing to say yes to Jesus! If you are here and need to make Jesus the Savior and Lord of your life, if you are ready to make that choice, while no one is looking around, would you just lift your hand so I can see who I'm praying for. If you are watching online on Facebook, you can type in the comments “pray for me” or reach out to us online. Let's pray.

May the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.