

Coach House Church BEACONS

WHAT A JOURNEY

4TH DECEMBER 2020

What a year it's been. What a journey we've been on together. There are some points in history that you will never forget, no matter how hard you try in certain circumstances. But sometimes they are part of lovely memories. If you were around in 1976, then you'll remember it as that great long summer, where the sun shone for weeks and we had clear blue skies and a glorious proper summer.

In contrast, late August in 2012, had rain, wind and more rain. I remember this as we were holding our youth camp in Anglesey. The high winds demolished two sets of tents and as cook for the camp I remember sliding through mud in my flip flops, delivering bacon butties to soggy yet happy campers.

Usually at the end of each year we spend time in the Lake District, at Bassenfell Manor, as an extended church family. We would be planning walks across the fells, den building in the woods, sharing cooking duties and enjoying meals and fellowship in lovely surroundings. We would finish the holiday with a new year's quiz and spend lots of time chatting and catching up, with each evening spending some time in worship, praise and time to reflect on God's provision for us. But not this year, unfortunately.

So, coming back to this year, who could have imagined how the days and months would pan out, how our journey through this year would play out. Yet, when we look at examples in the bible, we are not the only people to have to deal with a change of plan, a surprise turn in the journey, the unexpected, the unwanted, the totally confusing twist and turns of everyday life events. Abraham - He had waited years for a son, an heir. He was 99 years old and his wife was 89! Yet when everything seemed just right, life was coming together, God asked him to give up his son. And Abraham trusted God and followed his directions to the letter, even to the point of preparing to sacrifice his son, yet fully trusting that God was in total control of the situation. Abraham responded to his son in Genesis 22:8 'God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son'. And he did.

Mary – The Angel Gabriel announced that she would give birth to God's son which was surprising enough.

As a result of his faith, God promised Abraham:

Genesis 22:17 I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, 18 and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."

Joseph – when he asked Mary to marry him, he did not expect her to announce she was pregnant divinely. In fact, it took divine intervention through a dream to help Joseph deal with the unexpected news.

In the dream, these words were spoken to help him make sense of a most confusing situation: Matthew 1:20 "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.

21 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."

Not only was his marriage to go ahead, but now Joseph was to be a direct part of God's plan to provide a saviour for the world. What a responsibility!

Mary – The Angel Gabriel announced that she would give birth to God's son which was surprising enough.

Luke 1:30 says 30 But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. 31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 32 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, 33 and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

Yet, she was then faced with the journey to Bethlehem to complete the census, as directed by the Roman government of the day. Just what she didn't need to do! Yet, their destination was not a total surprise as it was prophesied by the prophet in Micah 5:2

2 "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

Even the shepherds who were just minding their own business, looking after their sheep did not expect to be journeying to see the Messiah. Heavenly choirs filling the sky with the most awesome surround sound must have been some experience that would have been recounted for years to come. You can imagine the family get-togethers as they reminisced about that night!

Wise men or magi – The Magi were probably Persian priest-astrologers who could interpret the stars, particularly the significance of the star that proclaimed the birth of the Messiah. Their story is told in Matthew chapter 2. They set off on an adventure from Persia, current day Iran, in search of new King. It is possible that the documents they had read were left behind by the Jewish captives who were exiled to Babylon, in the times of Daniel (him of the lions' den). So, here again, what seems like a disaster, with Daniel and the Jewish people taken into captivity away from their homeland and everything that was familiar can still have long lasting positive results.

The journey of the magi nearly ended in chaos when they arrived at Herod's palace, presuming a new King to be born in a royal residence.

It would seem at first reading that Jesus being born in a place where animals were housed, was a terrible mistake. The important thing was not where, but the fact that he was born, that God stepped down into the world he created in the form of his one and only son.

C S Lewis described it well: Once in our world, a Stable had something in it that was bigger than our whole world.

All these people, Abraham, Mary, Joseph ...complied with and followed the directions given to them, however, strange, unusual or even sometimes upsetting they were. They put their trust in God. Another quote by C S Lewis says

"We must stop regarding unpleasant or unexpected things as interruptions of real life. The truth is that interruptions are real life."

How often do we think that something not going the way of our plans is bound to end in disaster. But this does not take into account that our life and future is in God's hands. As Isaiah reminds us, in chapter 55:8-9

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,"

declares the Lord.

9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

As Christians, we tackle real life and what it throws at us, not on our own but guided and supported by a Holy God, full of Hope and certainty. We can talk openly to Jesus through prayer asking for help and guidance on life's journey. We are not expected to manage alone.

Max Lucado, a pastor and author says:

Our prayers may be awkward. Our attempts may be feeble. But since the power of prayer is in the One who hears it and not in the one who says it, our prayers do make a difference.

As we come to the end of this year we need to remember we have this connection with our creator God, our Saviour Jesus and our comforter his holy spirit. We can continue forwards knowing that God is never surprised by any events. Even when we are uncertain, we can put our hope and trust in our Saviour, Jesus, the light of the world who came to save and guide us on our journey through the coming year.



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