

12-25-22

Luke 1:26-38, 2:1-14.

Merry Christmas!

Read Luke 2:1-14.

The glory of Christmas has a variety of glorious facets to explore. The truth that the Good Shepherd not only can carry you, but also **WANTS** to carry you, is one glorious part of the greatest story ever told. Jesus, described in the pages of John's gospel as The Good Shepherd (cf. **John 10**), is more than able to carry the weight that may be pressing on your shoulders during this Christmas season.

- The Good Shepherd calls His sheep by name, and He leads them.
- The Good Shepherd leads His sheep and goes before them.
- The Good Shepherd's sheep recognize His voice and follow Him.
- The Good Shepherd gave (willingly laid down) His life for the sheep.
- The Good Shepherd has only one flock.
- The Good Shepherd knows His sheep and takes care of their every need.

The Hebrew word for "glory" is the word kavod. (Pronounced kuh-vode.) Kavod not only means "glory", but also it means "weight." With that in mind, the glory of Christmas has an aspect of weightiness. While this season certainly can get tangled in superficial commercialism, there is at the center of Christmas a weightiness, an importance, a respect that is filled to overflowing with honor and majesty. Kavod...weight...glory.

If we are not careful, an unnecessary and undesirable weight around unhealthy Christmas expectations can begin to slump our shoulders and suffocate our soul. We can find ourselves feeling pressed to get everything done from decorating to shopping to baking to figuring out how to see everybody in a way that leaves family and friends feeling satisfied (or not) with the amount of face time everybody was able to "enjoy" all while donning those ugly Christmas sweaters. There can be feelings of so much to do with not enough time (or money!) to get it all done.

Our 31-week pregnant "Mary" in the video certainly had her plans for life altered when she and her husband found out they were pregnant. Two in college and one in the womb was not how this "Mary" had mapped out her life unfolding in this season. Perhaps she was expecting to fill her empty nest with travel, reallocating freed up money from braces to remodeling her house now that the kids were gone...with straight teeth. Whatever our "Mary's" plans may have been, coupling college tuition with diapers and baby formula was not what she had in mind.

God reminds us in the Bible that He knows a thing or two about the plans for our lives. God wants to remind you this Christmas that the heaviness of your circumstances can be carried along by the truth of His words concerning the plans He has for your life. Fear not; and like Mary did after she gave birth to Jesus that first Christmas, ponder these things in your heart anew for a moment. (cf. **Luke 2:19**)

"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." Jeremiah 29:11

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.” Proverbs 3:5-6

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” Romans 8:28

“The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.” Proverbs 16:9

“But, as it is written, ‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.’ 1 Corinthians 2:9

God has a pattern of sharing His intentions for planning things in our lives that may be different than we sometimes plan things out in our minds. And it is not wrong to plan. As a wise person once said, *“You have to have a plan so you can know what to deviate from.”* However, may we not get crushed by the weight of our plans changing from what we had in mind. The Good Shepherd desires to carry you through the changing plans in the different seasons of your life.

Will you let him? Will you choose to trust? Will you choose to take a breath? Will you choose to notice the glory of Christmas by looking at Jesus and His birth story with fresh eyes and a lighter heart this season?

God wants to show you His glory of Christmas. Sometimes He chooses to go to supernatural lengths to unveil the plans He has in mind. He did that for a young teenage girl 2000 years ago that was represented in the nativity play. Remember what was said to her in Luke’s gospel that would lead to the glory of Christmas and the plans God had in mind for this young girl named Mary.

Read Luke 1:26-38.

Mary’s plans changed that day the angel of the Lord encountered her with a new set of plans leading to the glory of that first Christmas in a Bethlehem stable. She could tarry and worry, or she could trust and wait on the Lord over the next nine months to fulfill His plans and carry her into motherhood. Mary chose to trust and wait. She chose to let God carry her through upcoming days of uncertainty, questions from society about her character, hardships on her husband who also would need some time to process this new change of plans.

And as the weight of all these circumstances and challenges mounted, God’s glory came into the world right on time, just as He had planned. The Apostle Paul says it like this in one of his letters.

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.” Galatians 4:4-5

Such a promise and a plan from God is weighty and glorious beyond all scales of measurement. God chose to invoke the plans of salvation by a divine conception into the womb of a young Jewish girl who had yet to ever experience motherhood. She would be entrusted to grow God’s glory in human form inside her body and give birth to full divinity clothed in full humanity.

Only God could come up with such a plan that would lead to all who call on the name of Mary’s baby, Jesus, to be saved from their sins. Not only that, but the true glory and weight of it all was that such a

plan would lead to those calling on the name of Jesus to be adopted as sons and daughters into the family of God.

What kind of a God could come up with family planning like that? The kind of God who would select a virgin girl to be the mom of His only begotten Son and a God who would choose to change the plans of a former soccer mom with two in college to be 31 weeks pregnant with her 3rd child...even at this season of life.

Our God knows the plans He has for all of us. As crazy as those plans may seem at times, they are plans for our welfare and not for our evil. They are plans to give us hope and a future. And that future includes a capacity to experience and enjoy the glory of Christmas.