

An Uncommon Christmas

Scripture used: Luke 2:8-12 (NLT)

OVERVIEW

Big Idea:

Our scripture today tells the story of the angel appearing to the shepherds to alert them to the good news that Jesus is born. Pastor Hurmon used this lovely text to to prepare us for an uncommon Christmas - one that we look at with a different set of eyes. We must break our routine this year, and engage with Christmas differently. Christmas is the foremost sacred Christian holy day, but it's also a civic and mercantile holiday that comes with stressful burdens and expectations (lights, gifts, parties, tree... to name a few). While we should not **skip** Christmas, we must resist the traditional pitfalls of this chaotic season, and instead find the "significant" in the "insignificant."

KEY POINTS

- 1) **Point #1** The Christmas season is when all our strange and conflicted emotions come out. Some of us dread Christmas as an endless list of to-dos and functions to attend. Or we feel inadequacy (as providers, organizers, multi-taskers...) and guilt for all our shortcomings. There is too much focus on money, with the average American spending \$960 on the holiday, most of it funded by credit, for a total national spend of \$350 billion. Imagine spending some of that not on ourselves but on "the alien, the widow, and the orphan" instead!
- 2) **Point #2** The Biblical story reminds us of the apparent insignificance of the holy family. Although a descendant of David, Joseph is a poor carpenter from an insignificant town (Nazareth) which was the "hood" (the ghetto) of that time and place. They cannot find lodging, ending up in a barn with their newborn baby in a manger, being kept warm with swaddling rags. Yet that baby is our Savior and Messiah! Similarly, the witnesses to the event, the shepherds, were considered uneducated, smelly, lawless people. God is hiding in unlikely places. He focuses on overlooked people. One way that Pastor Hurmon encouraged us to think about the significant in the "insignificant" is to remember to nourish our souls this Christmas. Our souls are often drained by the "obligations" of Christmas, whether family, work, gifts, parties, etc. Yet, Christmas itself is designed to nourish our souls, reminding us that God is with us and God loves us.
- 3) **Point #3** Pastor Hurmon offered three tips to rethink Christmas:
 - a. Slow down and create space for neighbors, co-workers, and complete strangers in a way that is soul-filling rather than soul-draining. What will you say NO to, what obligations will you turn down, in order to create that space?
 - b. Show up and be fully present. Be aware. Go from "the presents I buy" to "I am present." The angel of the Lord was a messenger who created radiance that surrounded the shepherds in glory.
 - c. Serve with generosity. Look for opportunities. Show a readiness to be kind. Pay attention, and treat people to gifts. When we give out of a sense of obligation, we often feel drained or overwhelmed. But when we choose to serve or give out of genuine generosity, not expecting anything in return, our souls are filled.

DISCUSSION

- 1) **HEAR** - How can you rethink Christmas in your own life, family, and rituals?
- 2) **UNDERSTAND** - How can you get freed from guilt and condemnation in order to live a whole new lifestyle of faith? How can you be more of Jesus' kind of person?
- 3) **DO** - Give yourself three concrete steps in the next two weeks to implement this new vision of Christmas, starting with service in our underfunded local schools on December 3rd and elsewhere. Consider inviting family and friends to the fun Christmas movie, "The Star", which Pastor Hurmon will be referencing for the message series in December. This will be fun common ground that will make it easier to invite others to our 5 special Christmas Gatherings on December 23rd and 24th!