

Thursday, December 8

Read Luke 1:26-38. Pastor Mike Slaughter, author of *Christmas is not your Birthday* shares the concept that Christmas is not about being perfect but about being favored. What do you think of when you read or hear the word “perfect?” What do you think of when you read or hear the word “favor?”

Being favored which the angel Gabriel proclaimed Mary to be, does not mean that life is going to be easy and marked with continual blessings. Mary wondered about the greeting Gabriel gave to her and she probably wondered about it for the rest of her life. What difficulties and challenges she faced! While being favored doesn’t imply an easy-going life, it does mean that God comes to us through all the messes in our lives and stays with us! Write your reflections about what it means to be favored over being perfect.

Friday, December 9

Pastor Slaughter wrote, wrote, “There are two Bible verses that my grandmother taught me around the age of four or five that are more profound than anything I learned in twenty-three years of formal educations. The first: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). The second: “Here I am! I stand at the door and know. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me.” (Revelation 3:20)

There are two great truths expressed in these scriptures: 1) God loves us and 2) God is with us. God comes to us in the messes of our lives and stays with us always. God’s Holy Spirit sustains us each and every day. Once again consider the question about where was God in the difficult times of your life? Can you feel God’s presence now? Meditate on these questions knowing God loves us and is with us! Write your thoughts here.

Message Notes – December 4, 2022

Christmas Is Not Your Birthday - A Perfectly Imperfect Christmas*

- I. Have you ever looked back at a _____ period of time or a _____ event in your life and wonder how you even made it through that time or event?
- II. Pastor and author, Mike Slaughter, wrote, “Our Christmas traditions have _____ the Jesus birth narrative by removing the event from its biblical and historical context.”
 - A. We’ve all seen the picturesque _____ scenes or the _____ crèches.
 1. Jesus was born in a stable, most likely a cave where animals were kept; wherever there are animals, there is _____.
 2. The real nativity scene was literally a _____!
 - B. In turn, Pastor Slaughter points out; Luke makes it clear that following the way of Jesus isn’t _____ or _____.
 - C. We sometimes have to cut through the _____ to fully receive the _____: God comes to us and because we know the end of the story, we also know that God is still with us!
- III. Pastor Slaughter, in his book *Christmas Is Not Your Birthday*, shares the concept that Christmas is not about being _____: it’s about being _____.
 - A. Gabriel greeted Mary saying, "Greetings, _____ one! The Lord is with you."

*Luke 1:26-38

- B. Why does God come to us and stays with us?
Because God _____ us and we are highly _____!
1. Why am I – why are you – highly _____ by God?
 2. Because we _____ to God.
 3. That doesn't mean life is going to be _____.

IV. When Gabriel explained to Mary that she was going to become pregnant, she asked a question, “_____ can this be, since I am a virgin?”

- A. It is a response that has _____ through the centuries.
1. A loving husband and father is _____ by a drunk driver.
 2. A child is diagnosed with an aggressive form of _____.
 3. A mother takes her life leaving behind her husband and _____ child.
 4. Four teenagers go to school and are _____ by another teenager.
- B. And we cry out, “_____ God? How can this be?”
1. God shows up in the middle of all our _____.
 2. God not only shows up but God _____ with us; we are not alone!

Daily Devotional Guide

The following is a daily devotional and study guide meant to enhance your understanding of the message and grow as a Christian.

It is offered for your personal reflection or to share with others.

Monday, December 5

Pastor Jack began the message with a question: Have you ever looked back at a difficult period of time or a challenging event in your life and wonder how you even made it through that time or event? Take a moment to recall such a time or event in your life. This probably isn't a fun exercise for many of us, however, remembering such times and events can remind us of the true

blessings of support and help from others. Meditate on that time and how you made it through that time. What did you do? Who was with you? How do you feel about that time in your life now? Where was God during that time of your life? Meditate on these questions and write your reflections here.

Tuesday, December 6

During the message, Pastor Jack shared a busy and stressful time in the life of his family. He experienced debilitating headaches for years. Many years later after that experience, while the pain is memorable, Pastor Jack focuses on the many positive things that happened during those years. He has “sanitized” the experience by doing so. Pastor Mike Slaughter writes that we “sanitize” the Christmas narrative with beautiful stable scenes and traditions that have little to do with the truest meaning of Christmas. What do you think about this concept of sanitizing difficult situations and the Biblical story of Christmas? Have you done the same in anyway? Perhaps you've even come to appreciate a difficult time or event in your life. Meditate on these thoughts and write your ideas here.

Wednesday, December 7

Read Luke 1:26-38. Read this passage with all your senses. What do you see? What do you smell? What do you hear? What would it be like to touch things mentioned in the scripture? (Would you immediately reach for hand sanitizer?) Are there any tastes from this Bible passages that you can imagine? What emotions and feelings can you imagine the people in the story having? What do you believe is the truth about the birth of Jesus 2000 years ago? How might our modern holiday traditions overshadow the reality of that first Christmas? Write your thoughts here.