

## **Sermon Series – Some Gifts are More than Just a Gift.**

### **#5 – When God Changes Your Plans**

**Matthew 1-2; Proverbs 16:9; 14:12; Jeremiah 29:11,13**

**Introduction:** On December 24, 1818, in the little village of Oberndorf, Austria, the whole town was preparing for the Christmas service.

As Father Mohr sat at his desk, someone knocked on the door. He opened the door for a woman, who explained that a family from over the mountain had asked that he come and bless their first-born child who had just been born.

Upon his arrival he saw the most beautiful scene. There lay the new mother in her bed smiling as she and the father were looking in the little wooden crib.

The priest blessed him and his parents; and as he trudged home through the silent snow, he thought of how this family reminded him of the scene in Bethlehem centuries before when Christ was born.

The words of a song came pouring in his mind, and as he arrived home, he wrote them down. His friend Franz Gruber composed the tune to the song. That congregation in Oberndorf heard “Silent Night” for the first time.

**Silent Nigh Holy Night, all is calm all is bright  
Ron yon Virgin Mother and Child,  
Holy Infant so tender and mild,  
Sleep in heavenly peace,  
Sleep in Heavenly peace.**

That beautiful scene is depicted on countless Christmas cards: A quiet winter’s night; a celestial spotlight from a star shining down on a lowly stable; a reverent birth; God’s holy child; livestock in awe; shepherds in humble worship; angels hovering nearby; and three kings traveling from afar bearing gifts; Silent night, holy night, all is calm.

**The problem is that this peaceful scene bears little connection to what really happened that night in Bethlehem. It was a Not So Silent Night.**

1. It was not silent in Bethlehem (Luke 2:1-7)
2. It was not silent in heaven (Luke 2:13-14)
3. It was not silent in the Judean hills (Luke 2:8-20)
4. It was not silent in Jerusalem.
5. It was not silent in the hearts of Joseph and Mary.

**Story:** There is the story about a grade school class that was putting on a Christmas play. In that class was one little boy who wanted so very much to be Joseph. But when the parts were handed out, his biggest rival was given that part, and he was assigned to be the inn keeper instead.

He was bitter about this, so during all the rehearsals he began to plot how to get even. On the night of the performance, Mary and Joseph came walking across the stage. They knocked on the door of the inn, and the innkeeper opened the door and asked them gruffly what they wanted. Joseph answered, **'We'd like to have a room for the night.'**

Suddenly the innkeeper threw the door wide open and said, 'Great, come on in and I'll give you the best room in the house.' Now, that wasn't in the script and for a few seconds poor little Joseph didn't know what to do.

But finally, the young Joseph stepped into the inn and looked beyond the innkeeper. He made a big production of looking right and left. He stepped back out beside Mary and said, **'No wife of mine is going to stay in dump like this. Come on, Mary, let's go to the barn.'**

**There are times when Christmas doesn't go according to plan. There are times when life doesn't go according to plan. There are times when you know what the script ought to be, but somebody changes it.**

Christmas is a story of everybody's plans getting changed. Nobody's life turned out the way they originally thought it was going to happen.

For Mary and Joseph, they certainly had their plans changed. They were just a young couple engaged to be married. All they wanted to settle down, have a home – peace and quiet. In the middle of all their preparation an angel comes along and says, “By the way, God has a new plan for you.

And Mary, there are three parts to this plan. Don’t get upset about it but Number one, you’re going to get pregnant before the wedding and it’s not going to be Joseph. *[Ok...]* Number two, this will be a miracle. It’s never been done before and it’s never going to happen again. We’re going to call it a virgin birth. And by the way, the child you will be carrying, he will be ... the Son of God. *[Really...]*” *God* messed up their plans.

God messed up the plans of King Herod. Herod was the king of Judea. He had been appointed by the Roman Empire to be the king over Israel and he wasn’t even Jewish. This guy was a control freak. Herod was paranoid about being overthrown. So, to control and protect his kingdom, he killed almost everybody he thought was a threat. He had his wife killed. He had his mother killed. He had his brother-in-law killed. He had his two own sons killed. When he heard that the king of the Jews has been born in Bethlehem, he went out and declared that every baby under two years of age in Bethlehem should be killed to make sure that his kingdom was secure.

But God messed up his plans.

The religious leaders of that day had their plans messed up. They were initially disturbed when the wise men appeared in Jerusalem asking where the king of the Jews would be born. But they weren’t curious enough to go check it out.

They had been praying for a messiah. They were praying that God would send them a political messiah. They weren’t looking for a spiritual savior. They were looking for somebody to come in and overthrow the Roman oppression of the Jewish nation. Suddenly Jesus arrives as a babe in a manger and grows up saying things like, “Love your enemy... Do good to those who despise you... Pray for those who persecute you... Return good for evil... Love your neighbor as yourself...” And they’re going *What?* This is not the Messiah we hoped for.

God changed their plans.

The innkeeper that first Christmas certainly didn't plan for all the extra crowd.

The shepherds were looking forward to another quiet night, sitting under the Bethlehem sky with the starry night, calm and quiet. Then suddenly, a bright light shined, and the sky lights up and the angel's announcement is made, "You guys had better get over to Bethlehem because the Savior of the world has been born." Their plans were changed.

Has God ever changed your plans? My message today is: **When God Changes Your Plans. Let's Pray**

Let me be clear. Everything that happens to you in your life is not God's will. Some problems we have, we brought on ourselves. We make dumb decisions, we make stupid mistakes, we say things that God didn't want said.

And sometimes other people cause problems in your life. Because we live on a broken planet, and everybody is born with a sin nature. That means we hurt each other. You hurt people, sometimes intentionally and sometimes unintentionally. And sometimes people hurt you, intentionally or unintentionally.

So, not everything that happens in the world is God's will. Rape is not God's will. Abuse is not God's will. Cancer and Alzheimer's and manner of sickness and disease are not God's will. That's why we're to pray "***Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.***" God's will is done perfectly in heaven, but not always on earth, because God gave us a free will and people frequently choose not to go God's way; even Christians.

But sometimes God intervenes, and He says, I'm going to do something special in your life. So, to do that I'm going to have to change your plans.

Proverbs 16:9 says: "***We can make our plans, but the Lord determines our steps.***" (NLT)

**What do you do when God changes your plans? When God changes your plans, you need to remember three things.**

**1. God Changes Your Plans to get Your Attention.**

Someone has said that God whispers to us in our pleasure, but he shouts to us in our pain. Pain is God's megaphone. Pain is God saying to you "Is anybody home? Is anybody listening; answer the phone? Are you paying attention?"

God's plan for Mary and Joseph was so incredible, so unbelievable, so ridiculously out of the ordinary; He had to do something extraordinary to convince them that it was really His will. So, he sent an angel. He doesn't normally do that, but the angel comes and says, this is what's going to happen.

**For you, God doesn't have to send an angel. You've got the bible and you've got the Holy Spirit.** You just need to listen. But that's not so easy. Because we're not very good listeners when it comes to listening to God.

Instead of listening to God we're talking all the time. Or when we're not talking, we're listening to something else, or watching TV, or texting someone. We're so busy God can't get through. People say, I never hear God talk to me. It's because you're not listening. The bible does say to be still and know God.

Do you ever just sit down and say, God is there anything you want to tell me?

God has a perspective you don't have. Proverbs 14:12 says, ***"There is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death."*** (NLT)

God is saying a lot of the decisions you make end up being dead ends. So often we make these decisions, we think we're right but end up in disaster. The reason why is we have limited perspective. We can't see the big picture that God sees. God can see everything that's going to happen in your life in 2024 right now.

**That's why beginning on January 8<sup>th</sup>, I'm calling for you to join me in 21 days of fasting and prayer.**

It's as if you were driving up the North Carolina mountains and going around all those curvy mountain roads and you get behind slow car. You wish you could pass that car, but you can't see around the curve. You don't know if it's safe to pass or if there's a vehicle coming the opposite direction.

When you were growing up, your parents had perspectives and life experiences that you didn't have.

And they probably told you, don't touch that stove, look both ways before you cross the street, be careful who your friends are, keep your promises, brush your teeth. (Story?)

When your parents taught you all that stuff, were they trying to hurt you or keep you from having fun? *No*. Because they hated you? *No*. They were saying that because they loved you.

When God says there's some things you need to do, and here's some stuff I don't want you to do, and we ignore it, because we think we know better than God. You're going to get burned!

Everything God does in your life he does it for your own good. He does it all out of love. He does it to protect you. As a loving parent, our heavenly Father, wants to keep us from a broken heart, a broken body, broken relationships, and broken dreams.

**When God changes your plans, He's trying to get your attention.**

## **2. God Changes Your Plans, Because He has a Better Plan.**

Jeremiah 29:11 says, ***“For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.”***

God is not going to force his plans on you. You can keep going with your little plan and have problems and stress, and all the things that happen when you try to go your own way. But God says I've got a better plan.

What do we know about God's plan? We know it's a bigger plan. It's a more rewarding plan. And, just so you know, it's likely to be a more difficult plan.

Mary and Joseph's plan was to get married, have kids, settle down, and grow the carpenter shop business. God said, I'm going to use you as a couple to bless the entire world. God's plan was a whole lot bigger for their life than they ever imagined. And God's plan for you life is bigger than you can imagine.

God's plan is also more rewarding. It will bring you true significance, satisfaction, and fulfillment. 1 Corinthians 2:9 says, ***“That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.” (NIV)***

**But here's what you need to understand, I don't want you to think that if you go with God's plan it will be easier. Most of the time, it's hard and difficult. And sometimes it's even painful. Like, why is this happening to me?**

When you think about God's plan to use Mary to bless the whole world it wasn't easy. It wasn't easy for her to face nine months of criticism and gossip. She's engaged to Joseph, but she's pregnant and it's from the Holy Spirit.

Then they take a long journey to Bethlehem while she's in her ninth month. It was painful and difficult for her to deliver her very first baby, by herself.

The plan was difficult, but it was a plan of promise. Mary didn't understand it and I'm sure she asked, “Why, God?”

There are some things that are happening in your life right now that you're asking, Why God? And you're not going to understand them right now.

**When God changes your plans, you need to remember, he's trying to get your attention, He's got a better plan. It's bigger, it's more rewarding, and it may be more difficult. But there's a third thing...**

### **3. God Changes Your Plans Because He wants You to Learn to Trust Him.**

Imagine how this whole Christmas thing tested Joseph's faith. Your fiancée comes to you and says, “Honey, I'm pregnant.” And you know it wasn't you.

We have no record in the bible of Joseph saying anything. But even though Joseph doesn't say anything, there are a lot of things said about Joseph.

#### **I. Trust God When in Doubt**

We see immediately that Joseph's life was turned upside-down the first time he is ever mentioned.

***"Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit."*** (Matthew 1:18, NASB)

At first sight, there seems to be some confusion, because verse eighteen tells us that he was, "betrothed" to Mary, then verse nineteen tells us that he was thinking about "divorcing her" and then in verse twenty she is called "his wife".

Jewish marriage was a three-step process. First, there was the ***engagement stage***. This was the contractual stage between both sets of parents.

I heard about a little girl who was four years old, and someone said to her, "Who are you going to marry when you grow up?" She said, "Donny." They said, "How do you know you are going to marry Donny?" She said, "I have to." They said, "Why do you have to?" She said, "Because all the other boys live across the street and mother won't let me cross the street!"

The second stage was called the ***betrothal stage***. This would be equivalent to our engagement. It lasted usually about one year and it was a binding contract that could only be dissolved by divorce. This is where we find Mary and Joseph. Then would come the ***marriage***.

Now Joseph has a real problem on his hands. He has a young teenage fiancée who is pregnant, but it is not his child. According to the law, if a young lady was found to be unfaithful before her marriage, one of three things could happen. She could be stoned to death, or the husband-to-be could make a public disgrace of her, or he could put her away privately.

At this point Joseph was full of doubt. He doubted Mary. He doubted her character, her purity, and her virginity. He doubted God, because even though Mary had by now told him that God was the father of the child, he didn't believe God could do this. Then he doubted himself, because he did not know what to do.

Several years ago, a young lady wrote Dear Abby and said, **"Dear Abby, I've been going with this man for some time now. Just before our wedding, I discovered that he has a wooden leg. Do you think I should break it off?"**

Joseph was wondering - should he break off this engagement? **" Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.** (Matt. 1:19, NIV)

**I love this about Joseph. When difficulties and trouble come, most people worry about how this will affect me; Joseph is concerned about how this will affect Mary.**

Joseph did something we should always do when we are in the middle of a situation where we don't know what to do. **" 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. 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."** (Matt. 1:20-21, NIV)

Matthew then gives the explanation of why God was doing this. **" All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet."** (Matt. 1:22, NIV)

**"Fulfill"** is the key word in the Gospel of Matthew. He uses that word over 15 different times in his gospel to show that Jesus fulfills all the prophecies, which means God is keeping His promises.

Then we read in verses 24 and 25 these words. **" When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. 25 But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.** (Matthew 1:24-25, NIV)

**Trust God's Promise When in Doubt....**

**II. Trust God When in Danger**

***"When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."***

***14 So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night, and left for Egypt, 15 where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON." (Matthew 2:13-15, NIV)***

Now Joseph is being asked to take a mother and a little baby 75 miles from Bethlehem to Egypt, and then another 100 miles into Egypt to get to a place of safety in that country.

**There is a lesson here:** God's way is not always the **safest** way, but God's way is always the **surest** way to His blessing and protection. God's will may sometimes lead you to dangerous places, but it's even more dangerous to be outside the will of God.

The reason why Joseph had to go to Egypt, even though it was a dangerous journey, is for this simple reason. "This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON.'" (Matthew 2:15)

## **Trust God in the Middle of Doubt... Trust God in The Middle of Danger...**

### **III. Trust God When the Way is Difficult**

***" 19 After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt 20 and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead."***

***21 So he got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there.***

***Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, 23 and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth.***

***So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.*** (Matt. 2:19-23, NIV)

Joseph had trusted God in the middle of doubt and then in the middle of danger, now he's trusting God in the middle of difficulty.

Nazareth was a small town on a hillside, hemmed in by 15 hills in a secluded corner of Galilee. All His life instead of being called, "Jesus of Jerusalem" or "Jesus of Bethlehem", He would be known as, "Jesus, of Nazareth."

The reason once again is - ***"This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: "He shall be called a Nazarene."***

God's plan for Joseph was a lot bigger than Joseph's plan for Joseph. There are times when God's Will is not the easiest thing to do. There are times when God's Will is not the most convenient thing to do, there are times when things are not turning out the way we planned; but we learn that: For every problem, God has a better plan.

There are times when Christmas doesn't go according to plan. There are times when life doesn't go according to plan. There are times when you know what the script ought to be but somebody or something changes the lines on us. What do you do then? Remember to Trust God in the Middle of Doubt... Trust God in The Middle of Danger...and Trust God in the Middle of Difficulty.

**CONCLUSION:** If you don't get anything else I say this morning, I want you to hear this as if your life depends on it because it does. **How do you please God?**

Jeremiah 29:13 says, ***"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."*** The first thing you must do is you have to seek God.

The Bible says in Hebrews 11:6, ***"Without faith it is impossible to please God."*** How do you please God? Not by religion. Not by ritual. Not by rules. Not by regulation. But simply by seeking God in faith.

What do you do when your plans fall through? You seek God. Let me tell you what you don't do. Don't seek the solution. Don't seek relief. Don't seek to get

away from it. Don't seek an explanation. *Seek God. "If you seek me, you will find me if you seek me with all your heart."*

The second thing you do is you trust God's plan. You trust that He knows what He's doing, that He's loving, that He cares for you, that He's going to see you through the situation.

Romans 8:28 says, ***"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."*** (NIV)

It doesn't say God causes everything. It says God causes everything to work for good. Not everything that happens in your life is good. There are things that happen in your life that are bad, whether you brought them to yourself or other people did them to you.

**But God causes everything to work for good. *If* we love God and we're living according to his plan and purpose. That's not a promise for everybody.**

When your plans get changed you just need to understand, God's testing you. The test is this: Am I going to trust God in the situation and do what He wants me to do or am I going to trust myself and figure it all out.

That's why God sent Jesus to be our Savior. Not just to save you from sin. But to save you from the effects of sin. Failure, fatigue, frustration, fear, doubt, depression, resentment, anger, loss, fear, worry, guilt, shame, resentment, bitterness. All the different emotions that come from not going with God's plan for your life. So that's why God sent Jesus.

This is what the angels announced at the first Christmas. *"Today a Savior has been born for you. He is Christ the Lord."* Why do we celebrate Christmas? Because God sent *you* a Savior.

You need a savior to save you from yourself. You need a savior to save you for a purpose. You need a savior to forgive all your sins. You need a savior to help you figure out the right path. You need God in your life.

**For most people, Christmas is a joyous and exciting time of year. But - as one man observed: "Unless we see the shadow of the cross**

**falling on the crib, we are not seeing Christmas clearly. Jesus didn't enter this world just to be a cute little baby, he came to suffer and die on a cross so that our sins might be forgiven and so that we might be saved."** (Paul L. Larsen Christ the King Lutheran New Brighton, MN)

Have you ever accepted God's gift to you? Let's say you gave me a Christmas gift and a few weeks into the New Year, you ask, "How'd you like the gift?" And I say, "I've been too busy to unwrap it."

You go, "I sent you a gift and you didn't even open it?"

You'd be offended and I would miss the blessing and the benefit of the gift. Yet millions of people celebrate Christmas after Christmas after Christmas and never open **the gift that is more than just a gift**. What's that all about? God sent you a Savior. Open the gift.