

“Where the Extraordinary Meets the Ordinary”

When planning important events, we usually try to make sure that all of the details are beautiful, amazing, or excellent because we want everything surrounding the event to reflect that what is happening is extraordinary. For example, when presidents get inaugurated, the event is a big to-do. Important persons and celebrities are present, the venue is decorated immaculately, and everyone is dressed to the nines.

This is how *Newsweek* described President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s inauguration on January 26th, 1953:

It wasn’t the biggest inaugural parade in history—but it was one of the most colorful. More than a million Americans got a glimpse of their new President leading a 10-mile procession from the Capitol to the White House. They also glimpsed some 20,000 service men and women, 65 musical units, 50 floats, 250 Indians, three elephants, 350 horses, a picked unit of Korean veterans, and the Army’s new 84-foot atomic cannon.

Extraordinary events should look very obviously, extraordinary.

Jesus' birth, although it had many majestic elements to it, did not have the same pomp and circumstance of a presidential inauguration. In fact, although there were many extraordinary signs and wonders that occurred, they happened in the presence of some pretty ordinary people in pretty ordinary settings.

Main Point: *But as we will discover, all of these ordinary characters, settings, and details, were planned to be part of this extraordinary event. Because, Jesus' Birth signals the breaking in of the EXTRAODINARY presence of God into our ORDINARY lives.*

Tonight, we are going to look at 3 ordinary/extraordinary pairs in the gospel of Luke that tell us a little more behind God's plan for Jesus' birth.

1) Extraordinary Messengers

Extraordinary: Announcement by Angels

Ordinary: Recipients were shepherds

Luke tells us that in the region of Bethlehem, there were shepherds in a field watching their flocks of sheep by night, when suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared to them and shared this incredible news; this very evening, the Savior and Messiah was born in town, not far away. And they would know his words were true because they

would find the baby lying in a manger. Then suddenly, the sky lit up, and this huge angelic army appeared and pronounced God's glory and peace on them. Truly, no earthly king could conjure up a more extraordinary group of beings to announce their arrival than an army of angels. But to whom did they make this announcement? It wasn't to other dignitaries. It wasn't to the priestly class or even the most religious in the city. It wasn't even to a large group. It was to shepherds, guarding the sheep of the city at night, away from the crowds. Shepherds would have generally been seen as simple, salt-of-the-earth, folks. They weren't wealthy; in fact, it was unlikely that these were their sheep. They were probably hired hands. And even though some of the most important figures in the Old Testament, Abraham, Moses, Jacob, and even David had been shepherds, the priests would have looked down on the shepherds because their work made them ceremonially unclean and unable to enter the temple. And yet, God chose to make this extraordinary announcement about the birth of his son first to them. Why?

Maybe it was because of their simple, down-to-earth nature. Reformation theologian Hugh Latimer suggests that the sign of the Messiah being laid in an animal trough would have been offensive to the sensibilities of

the wealthy, religious, and elite because they would have been expecting something extraordinary. The shepherds, because they were ordinary folk, could appreciate an ordinary sign. He writes that “In this we can learn from these shepherds not to be offended by the poor kingdom that our Savior kept in this world, for we can see that it is very common for the rich and wealthy of this world to despise and scorn the Word of God.”

William Barclay makes the suggestion that the flock the shepherds were guarding outside of Bethlehem belonged to the temple, and that the lambs used for ritual sacrifice came from those very flocks. So, maybe because the shepherds protected the lambs to be sacrificed for God, God allowed them to be the first to see the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world.

I believe God used extraordinary messengers to make an extraordinary announcement to ordinary men in order to show that He wants to be with us in our ordinary lives.

2) Extraordinary Light Display

Extraordinary: Amazing Light Display

Ordinary: Not Seen by Many

Every year, hundreds of thousands of people visit the Columbus Zoo during the Christmas season to see the Wildlights for the incredible light displays, the music, and the magic of the atmosphere. I can only imagine the man hours it takes to set up the over 3 million twinkling Christmas lights in elaborate displays. But can you imagine if they did all of that work only to turn them on at 3 in the morning for only a handful of people? Would it be worth it, and would it have as awesome of an effect on people? Poet Alan Ginsberg asked the question “What if they threw a war and nobody came?” While we can imagine the wonder of a host of angels lighting up the Bethlehem night, it would have made more sense for this to happen in the city where most of the people could have seen it. It’s especially perplexing for this to happen this way, considering that this was the grand announcement of the birth of the Messiah! God planned this extraordinary light display and unleashed it onto a small crowd of insignificant shepherds, because He wanted to show that His message of salvation was first to the ordinary.

3) Extraordinary Birth Place

Extraordinary: Jesus is royalty born in the royal city of David

Ordinary: Jesus was born amongst animals in an ordinary place

When Erin and I were deciding which hospital we were going to have our child at, we tried to take several things into consideration. How far away is it from where we live? How are the facilities? Are they up-to-date, are they nice and clean, and are they comfortable and intimate? What do we know about the hospital staff, are they reputable? Ultimately, we decided to go with Marysville hospital because our nephews were born there, Erin's sister works there as a nurse, and we were impressed by the facilities and care given during that time.

Luke 2:4 tells us that Mary and Joseph, needing to travel to Joseph's hometown because of a required census, go to Bethlehem, which Luke calls the city of David. Being known as the city of King David means that Bethlehem must have been seen as a royal city, which would make it a worthy place for the birth of the King of Kings, Jesus. But as we also see from Luke, Jesus wasn't born into a place worthy of royalty. Now, scholars disagree exactly where Jesus was born. All Luke tells us, in 2:7, is that Mary gave birth to Jesus and "laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn." Traditionally, we have assumed that because there were

so many travelling to Bethlehem for this census, Joseph and Mary could find no rooms available and were forced to stay and give birth in a stable or cave where animals were kept, using a feeding trough as a bassinet to hold the newborn baby Jesus. One scholar suggests that the “inn” really referred to a guesthouse, but that since Joseph would have had family in the city they ended up staying in the main house, which also happened to be used to hold the animals, and that Mary essentially gave birth to Jesus in the living room of the house amongst relatives. This view could be true, and it certainly gives a less bleak and friendlier vision of that evening. But either way, Jesus’ birth as the King of Kings in the royal city of David did not happen in a royal, extraordinary place. It happened in a very ordinary way, very much unbecoming of a king. But God sent his royal son to be born into an ordinary setting to show that God chooses to be with us in ordinary places.

Transition: So, in Luke we find God using an angelic choir and incredible light display to announce the birth of his Son, the savior and Messiah, born in the royal city and laid down among animals to a group of men who were not considered worthy to worship Him in the temple. The extraordinary meets the ordinary. And why did God choose to send His Son to the world in such a way?

Main Point: *Jesus' Birth signals the breaking in of the EXTRAORDINARY presence of God into our ORDINARY lives.*

And this Christmas, God is trying to break into our lives again, but are we ready to receive Him?

In the Poem "The Risk of Birth," Madeleine L'Engle writes about the risky nature of God sending his son in the midst of the chaos and turmoil of the world we live in.

And just as it was in Jesus' day, we still live in a world affected by this same chaos. Unfortunately, because of sin, violence, death, and all kinds of evil has become a very ordinary thing in our world. But God sent Jesus into our world so that the EXTRAORDINARY grace and love of Christ could overcome the ORDINARY presence of sin and darkness. This is what she writes in "The Risk of Birth:"

This is no time for a child to be born,
With the earth betrayed by war and hate,
And a nova lighting the sky to warn,
That time runs out and the sun burns late.
That was no time for a child to be born,
In a land in the crushing grip of Rome,
Honor and truth were trampled by scorn,
Yet here did the Savior make his home.
When is the time for love to be born?
The inn is full on the planet earth,
And by greed and pride the sky is torn—
Yet Love still takes the risk of birth.

Conclusion: This Christmas season, may we receive and celebrate the EXTRAORDINARY love of God through His son Jesus coming into and rescuing us from the ordinariness of our lives.