

## **I. Intro. This is time of year for celebrity Xmas appearances**

### **A. Of course, Santa appearances are quite common**

1. Read frequently in newspapers and online ... happen at banks, shopping centers, schools, Xmas programs & private Xmas parties
2. Here are some Santa sightings that happened just in past month



a)  
@ Bonneyville Mill county park



b) Another one with Mrs. Claus on their way to Bristol



c) Farther south in Evansville, this little toddler & Santa apparently both fell asleep!

3. Now cutesy Santa Claus pictures are something we may expect to see at this time of year, but I hope we would agree that someone dressed in a Santa suit is NOT the personal appearance that matters most @ Christmas.

## **B. To me, the real Q is: Will God's Messiah make an appearance for Xmas in Elkhart Co. this year?**

1. In a certain manner of speaking ... answer is YES ...

a) *In church Xmas programs ... i.e. Last Sunday night right here*

b) *In concerts & other Xmas programs of the season: beautiful Xmas music at concerts put on by local high schools ... or @ Goshen College*

c) *In many charitable campaigns & assistance programs for people in need locally, through corporations, agencies & civic groups ...*

(1) In a practical way, Christ does show up every year for families in need thru these programs

(2) But you know it's easy to take such things for granted because these Christmas charity programs will probably keep going every year, regardless of whether you & I individually contribute or not

2. Will the Messiah make an appearance in Elkhart Co. this year?  
From another angle, the answer is partly up to each of you

a) The answer depends on how well you can follow in Mary's footsteps

b) What do I mean by that?

## **II. Let's review Mary's story, which Lyle introduced us to last week, with the Magnificat passage that follows just after our Scripture reading this morning**

### **A. God's angel Gabriel comes to a poor, teenage Jewish girl**

1. She's from a small town in a backwater region of Palestine ... she's legally engaged, but not yet living w/ her fiancé

2. The initial shock of an angel visitation would be big enough, but Gabriel drops a verbal bomb: You're going to have a baby!

3. Then he doesn't stop there but immediately launches into a long list of additional info about the child to come:

a) Talks about his name ... How great he'll be ...

b) He'll be called Son of God ... Heir of King David's throne ... Eternal ruler of God's people Israel

4. Meanwhile at that point, you prob. could have knocked Mary over w/ a feather!

### **B. In contemporary terms I imagine Mary saying,**

1. *"Whoa! Time out, Gabe! You just jumped from A to Z, but I'm*

*still back at A. You lost me before you got to this 'greatness and kingship' stuff. Back up a bit ... & let's talk about this 'baby' thing. Remember? I have no husband yet to be sexually active with. I'm still a virgin."*

2. So think about it: What could be more preposterous (or scary) than what Mary has just heard?

### **III. It's not so hard for us to relate to this story today**

#### **A. "What if an angel came to you this week & announced you were pregnant?" ... Seriously ...**

1. Prob. over 80% of us here today would laugh, or scoff, roll our eyes ... Why?

2. We would have valid reasons to disbelieve:

- a) Those who are male
- b) Many simply too old
- c) Some have had doctors/surgeons intervene to eliminate that possibility
- d) Some potential parents may have been celibate lately, by choice or by chance
- e) Many are still virgins, (as they should be for their situation in life)

3. A minority of us today might not be surprised to get this news, but most of us can relate to Mary's being perplexed & skeptical

#### **B. Gabriel gave Mary an awesome charge:**

1. Basically he was saying "You are to carry inside you ... & then bring forth ... the Son of God!" *Wow!*

2. At least we're not asked to bear the Savior of the world ... to give birth to Jesus ... nurse him ... change his diapers ...

3. Or are we?

### **IV. (Introducing "mothers of God")**

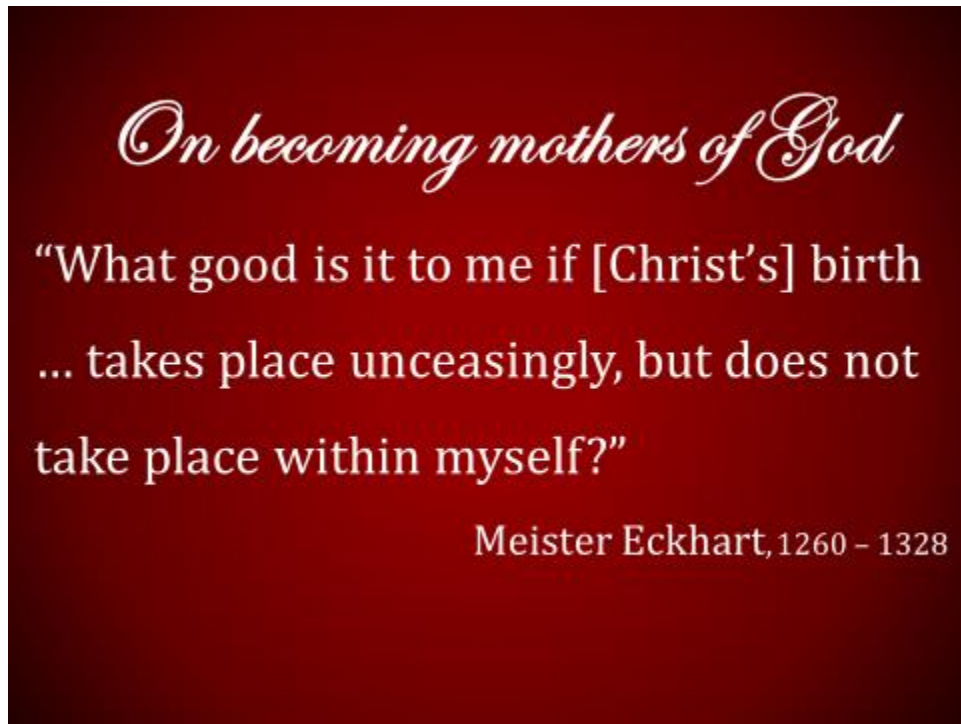
**A. Some 700 years ago, German theologian Meister Eckhart** wrote something that caught my eye a few years ago in Advent:

1. *"We are all meant to be mothers of God. ... What good is it to me if this eternal birth of the divine Son takes place unceasingly but does not take place within myself? ...*

2. And what good [is it] to me if Mary is full of grace, if I am not also

full of grace? ... What good is it to me for the Creator to give birth to his son if I do not also give birth to him in my time and culture?"

<http://interruptingthesilence.com/2010/12/18/mothers-of-god/>



(repeat 1<sup>st</sup> 2 sentences)

3. What good indeed? Eckhart's questions lead me to ask you a few more questions:

- a) Is Jesus going to be born in you this Christmas?
- b) Will you give birth to God's son in your own place and time?

## **B. In a way, we too, hear the same call as Mary did**

1. I'm NOT talking re. just the common Christmas call to "receive the Christ child"

- a) You're probably familiar with that phrase from v. 3 of "O little town of Bethlehem":

*"where meek souls will receive him, still the dear Christ enters in ..."*

- b) That call is true, but if that's all you do with baby Jesus this year, I fear that Xmas has become pretty shallow ...

2. Simply "receiving the X child" is a relatively passive thing to do ...

- a) the spirit of the Christ child ... the concept of the Christ child is something we can say "yes" to fairly easily ...
- b) but it usually means we return to our regular busy lives only temporarily impacted by the birth of a baby 2K years ago ...

c) If you're like me, the effect of "receiving the Christ child" into my heart wears off fairly quickly when ...

(1) my spouse & I get into a disagreement,

(2) or people I rely on let me down,

(3) or a sudden crisis ruins my other plans

d) Mary was called to be mother of God ... We need to take on that call as our own

### 3. In the name of honesty, let me make a quick appeal:

a) To those of you mothers who personally know what pregnancy, labor & delivery feel like, please bear with me ...

(1) As a male preacher, I'm not attempting to be cute or presumptuous with the following reflections.

(2) I speak more out of what I hope is accurate observation than out of personal experience. I recognize that many females here have also not experienced pregnancy or giving birth

b) Mary was called to be mother of God ... I certainly invite women's perspectives on this idea of us being mothers of God

## V. (Our calls, from Mary's example)

### **A. I believe the call for Mary & for each one here is 1<sup>st</sup> of all to bear Christ within us**

1. To abandon our soul & body to the God who has called us ...

a) When we don't know why crazy things are happening to us ... when we're not sure IF God even has any purpose behind the suffering we see & feel in the world,

b) Then we need to try breathing deeply & saying, "Here I am, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your word."

c) Sometimes, we need to keep surrendering with these words of Mary until it feels like Christ starts growing in us

2. The call is to "become large" w/ him ... to groan w/ the spirit of Christ inside us, to feel Christ "kicking" (so to speak) inside of us, waiting to come out ...

3. This 1<sup>st</sup> call is to nurture Christ in us ... to take care of ourselves spiritually & physically, just as a pregnant woman must take care of herself

- a) In these few days between now & Xmas, the demands & the to-do lists may leave us feeling out of breath.
- b) Can we pause long enough ... to pray? ... to read even a brief Scripture or devotional that helps ground us spiritually no matter what life throws at us?
- c) After all (as Paul says in 1 Cor. 6:19) our bodies are the temple of the Spirit of X inside us
  - (1) When we take good care of ourselves physically & spiritually, we are in fact stronger "Christ-bearers" & we put ourselves in a better position for a robust Christ to come forth from our lives
  - (2) This connection between our physical bodies and our spiritual health is something we will hear more about in another worship series in February

## **B. After the call to bear Christ within us, the 2<sup>nd</sup> call, for Mary & for us, is to give birth to Christ:**

### 1. How do we do that?

- a) Does a new mother with a healthy child normally stay at home all the time, & refuse all visitors who want to see the baby?
  - (1) Of course not!
    - (a) We thank God for little Eli Bowman and Charles Lehman. We have come to smile and enjoy their beautiful faces & tiny little hands because Mikki (& Mark), Anne (& Aaron) have showed up at church and they are showing off their little gifts from God.
    - (b) New parents usually want to show off the baby & share their joy w/ everyone!
    - (c) We look forward to a day soon when Julie & Eric Yoder can also joyfully show off little Claire Eloise, as she joins Dane & Heath.
  - (2) So we give birth to Christ by not just keeping him to ourselves, but sharing him with the world, just like the proud mother who wants everyone to know her baby
- b) We give birth to Christ ...
  - (1) every time we respond w/ patience & a kind word instead of retaliating when we're injured
  - (2) when we give compassionately of ourselves & our money because that's what Jesus would do ...
    - (a) maybe it's helping out with a special holiday giving campaign at our school or job

(b) or maybe it's responding to the Salvation Army's urgent appeal for some more bell ringers at local stores yet this week

(3) when someone asks us why we serve others when we wouldn't have to & we respond w/ "because I'm a Christian"

2. Like Mary 2K yrs ago, we are called to bear Christ in us, and to give birth to Christ in today's world.

a) In this way, we move beyond v. 3 of "O little town of Bethlehem" where it names simply "receiving Christ"

b) In this way we move on to v. 4 of the carol, where it invites the holy child to "be born in us today"

## VI. Conclusion

**A. "Will God's Messiah appear in Elkhart Co. this year?" I pray that, as you become one of the "mothers of God," the answer will be a clear YES**

1. Even if you, like me, have not literally had your body looking and feeling different because of someone growing inside of you ...

2. even if you, like me, haven't literally felt those waves of pain called contractions ...

3. I'm calling today for you to get your "spiritual prenatal check-up"!

**B. Are you bearing Christ within you these days? Is he about to be given birth through you?**

**C. I'd like to close w/ how I believe an angel might greet all of us if we were told today we were pregnant with Jesus:**

*"Greetings, favored one! ... Bear Christ in you. ...  
Nothing is impossible with God!"*