

Christmas 2020 Amidst Broken Dreams: God Is Using This



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This Christmas season feels like no other, with drastic changes and broken dreams impacting the season usually marked by joy and celebration. We've lost friends. We've lost jobs. We've lost perspective. And at times it can feel like we are losing hope. Life is messy and hard, and we are wondering when or if things will be normal again. I know I am. It is hard to feel excited about anything and easy to forget why we celebrate at all.

Yet I am convinced that the worldwide pandemic is no accident, neither is the social and political unrest in our country. Living in it is hard, sometimes devastating, but the truth remains: God is using this.

There are no accidents with God. Nothing is wasted. Everything has a purpose. God's timing is perfect. Of course, we can only see that in retrospect. Hindsight is 20/20 and perhaps only after 2020 has been long closed will we glimpse what God was doing.

God's Timing is Always Perfect

It is only with that hindsight that we can view the events of Christmas Eve two thousand years ago as the perfect fulfillment of all God had spoken. Up close it would have looked different. The Jews had waited centuries for the promised Messiah, long foretold by the prophets. But God had now been silent for 400 years. God's chosen people must have felt forgotten.

Yet in that time God was preparing the world for his coming. The Greeks had given the civilized world a common language that would enable the Gospel to spread. Roman rule brought unprecedented peace, known as the Pax Romana, and a physical infrastructure with roads that made travel possible. Roman roads united the world.

The world was finally ready for the long-awaited Messiah. The Jews had not been forgotten- the moment they had been waiting for since God's promise to Abraham was finally here. But at the time

they didn't know it. Very few were aware of it. A poor Jewish couple. Some farm animals. Lowly shepherds tending sheep.

But the heavenly hosts knew. They had been waiting on tiptoe for centuries. They knew that the fulfillment of all God's promises was here.

Up Close it Looks Like a Mess

Even narrowing our focus further, from the timing for the world we see the specific timing for Mary and Joseph. This couldn't have been messier timing for them. Mary was an unmarried virgin. Her pregnancy was scandalous. She could have been stoned. And even after those humiliations, the long trek to Bethlehem could not have come at a more difficult time.

The couple traveled alone to the city of David and Mary gave birth in a stable without friends or family around. No one would take them in. She put her precious baby in dirty, smelly manger, an animal feeding trough, because there was nowhere else to put him.

No mother wants to do that. Especially when your pregnancy starts with high expectations. Mary was told by an angel how favored she was (Luke 1:30). She might easily have assumed that God was going to work everything out by Christ's birth. She knew that all generations would call her blessed (Luke 1:48) but did she know that it would take decades to glimpse the blessing? Or that a sword would pierce her own soul? (Luke 2:35)

God is Using Even the Difficult Details

Placing the Christ child in a manger, far from home with only Joseph beside her, may have felt like a low point. And yet this strange and uncommon detail was part of God's plan because it was the way the shepherds would recognize Jesus. All babies would have been wrapped in swaddling clothes but only one would have been lying in a manger – which was the confirmation that this indeed was the one that Israel had been waiting for. The cries of a baby broke the 400-year silence of God. All the messy, embarrassing, and humbling details of Mary's story had a purpose, a purpose she could not have understood in the moment.

We often read the stories in Scripture assuming that the characters are privy to the same understanding that we now have. But Mary was like us, living her daily life, unaware of how God was intertwining the details of all that was happening. The shepherds' visit and the startling confirmation that the manger was not an impulsive, embarrassing detail but rather a sign, a confirmation to the world that her child indeed was the son of God must have encouraged her, but there was still so much more she couldn't have known.

That Bethlehem night, as Mary delivered the Son of God in a stable in the piercing cold and placed him in a manger, she couldn't have fully grasped what God was doing. It was only in looking back that she could see how God was moving in her life and how every detail was significant.

God's Purposes are Clearer in Retrospect

And so it is for us. We are all in the middle of the stories God is writing. Perhaps we've received a significant word from God but it is interwoven with unspeakably hard circumstances that leave us

screaming, "It's not supposed to be this way!" We may be left confused and bewildered, wondering what God is doing and how this could possibly end well.

Though we cannot see it now, we need to trust that God is using this. To trust that God is doing his deepest work right here, in our loneliness, in our disappointment, in our fear. To trust that even now, there is purpose and movement happening that we cannot see, as we long for things to go back to the way they were. The story is not over yet and God is ordering every detail for his good and perfect plan. Like Mary, we must wait for it to unfold.

Our Comfort: God is With us and Will Deliver Us

God is not delaying his deliverance for you. It will come at exactly the right moment. All that God has for you will be fulfilled at the appointed time. If it seems slow, if it feels messy, you just need to wait. It will surely come: it will not delay (Habakkuk 2:3).

So this Christmas, as we wait, we cling to the greatest gift that God has given us in trouble - his presence, God with us. We trust that he is perfectly weaving together every pain, every sorrow, and every loss, into a beautiful tapestry for his glory. And we remind ourselves and each other, amidst our broken dreams and changed plans, that God is using this.