

The Miracle

A question as we begin today . . . Do you believe in “miracles”? The dictionary defines a “miracle” as being “a highly improbable or extraordinary event, development, or accomplishment that brings very welcome consequences”.

But is that dictionary definition adequate enough for us to truly understand what a miracle is, or is a “miracle” something that is so incredibly wonderful and different that it is perhaps simply beyond our realm of understanding?

As we read today’s scripture text, may we ask the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of our hearts and allow us to see what a “true miracle” is all about. Follow along with me as I read these words here in Luke 2, beginning in verse 1.

¹ And it came to pass in those days *that* a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. ³So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city.

⁴Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. ⁶So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. ⁷And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

⁸Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. ¹⁰Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. ¹¹For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹²And this *will* be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.”

¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

¹⁵ So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger.

¹⁷Now when they had seen *Him*, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. ¹⁸And all those who heard *it* marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. ¹⁹But Mary kept all these things and pondered *them* in her heart.

²⁰Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them. (Luke 2:1-20)

Again, as for "miracles", often in today's manner of conversation, we find people searching for strong words to use, words that reach beyond the normal. They seem to think that if they can emphasize an event or a deed strongly enough, then those who are listening will be more apt to believe their words. And one of those words of strong emphasis is this word "miracle".

But too often, the way in which the word is used does not accurately fit the meaning of the word. Most often, the word "miracle" is used to describe some human effort that was extraordinary. But can human effort really produce a true "miracle"?

Extra human effort can and does make men and women into "heroes", but "hero" is also another word that is often over-used and inaccurate in its application. But even if a person does a truly heroic act, that is not the same as performing a miracle. The two, "miracles" and "heroes" are made from entirely different stuff.

Extra human effort can produce a hero, but no amount of human effort can ever produce a miracle. A miracle simply resides in another realm altogether, the realm of God.

Another question . . . Do miracles take place often? Are miracles perhaps even more commonplace than we might realize? As for me, I truly believe that they are! For me, miracles are actually God's way of keeping our world and our lives functioning through all of the moments of our day. It is God and God alone who makes the air we breathe "fit" for our next breath. It is God and God alone who has placed the sun, the moon and stars in the heavens to give our days the light that we need, the food that grows and the rain that falls.

And to me, all of those things are miracles because they come from and continue to exist daily through the power and the control of God and God alone. Man cannot do anything to make any of those provisions.

We have in our scripture lesson today another form of a miracle, the birth of a baby. And yes, even though in this world somewhere every few second another baby is born, it is still a miraculous occurrence. Why, because, while yes, we men and women do participate in the conception of those babies, to think that we, or some natural occurrence was at work in the formation of our bodies is just not possible. Our bodies, our hearts, our souls, our spirits are too miraculous a creation to come solely from the hands of man or from nature.

The words in Psalm 139 tell us exactly how each of us came into being. Listen! Psalm 139,

¹³ For you (Oh Lord) created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb ¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.
(Psalm 139:13-14)

To think that we as human beings do much past that first moment of human conception is arrogant foolishness.

So, yes, as I said a moment ago, miracles probably are far more commonplace than we could ever imagine, God sustaining the very existence of the earth, and God meeting the needs and desires of each one of us, every moment of every day. And it all takes place right before our eyes, but we seldom see it.

But with all that being said, this “miracle” that we read about here in these words, the birth of the baby Jesus, is a miracle like no other, a miracle that goes far and beyond every other miracle that has ever taken place or ever will take place in all of existence, the greatest of all miracles.

And it's not just because Mary was a virgin, and that Jesus had no earthly father like all the rest of us. That is miraculous, but there is even so much, much more than that.

This was the greatest of all miracles because God Himself came to earth to live among us, to be our “Emmanuel” “God with us”, to walk among us, to live a sinless life and then to die on a cross to pay the debt for our sins.

But thanks be to God there is still even more within this miracle. This same Jesus rose again from His own death and defeated the whole concept of death once and forever, so that He could then say to us that we who believe in Him would have life and never die. Listen! In John 11,

²⁵Jesus said . . . “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. (John 11:25-26)

And then, to make this an even greater miracle, Jesus gave us His Holy Spirit to come and live within our souls, to give us His “resurrection power” so that we would never again be controlled by the power of sin.

And then, to make this miracle all the more greater, Jesus also now sits continually at the right hand of God the Father making intercession for us.

A verse in Isaiah 9 seems to say all that we need to know. There we are told in simple but profound words . . . “The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.” And He has!

Every part of every moment that went into the advent of the baby Jesus arriving on this earth was a true miracle, and it came directly from God's own hand.

Let me say all this again, because it all bears repeating a thousand times.

1. Mary was a virgin!

2. The Holy Spirit filled her body, and she conceived the Christ-child Jesus, the "Holy One of God".
3. She delivered the baby Jesus there in Bethlehem, just as it was prophesied.
4. Men and angels, all heaven and earth, rejoiced to see His coming because He would be the Savior of all mankind.
5. He lived his life without sin, and He died the perfect sacrifice so that you and I might live.
6. He gave us His Holy Spirit to live within us to give us assurance and to be our comforter.
7. And He now sits at the right hand of God the Father making intercession for us.

Folks, this truly was a miracle, the greatest miracle that mankind will ever know.

Before we close our time of meditation on these words today, may I remind us of something that I have said often, but needs be said over and over again. The occurrences that take place each day on this earth are not random happenstances, isolated coincidences that simply come together to form some of the patterns of life.

Yes, man makes his own plans for most all the matters that take place within his day, seemingly going about it all fully and willfully in control of all those activities and events. And to some extent, he is. But, intertwined within all of those man-made plans and activities and those seemingly random occurrences is also the invisible Hand of God, busily working out and bringing into fruition all of His plans and His purposes. And His plans and purposes do often detour and even change many of those plans and purposes and activities that we have made.

And strangely, we seldom even recognize His presence, or the fact that He has actually been involved. We simply adjust ourselves to those detours and changes that He has made, thinking them to be coming out from our own minds.

The bible teachers call that phenomena "concurrency", the intimate intertwining of the unseen Hand of God within the activities of our own hands. It truly is a strange phenomenon! But for those of us who love the

Lord Jesus as our Savior, it is a blessed and wonderful interaction. And I praise the Lord for it!

And if we will simply take a small step back and take a careful look at each of these things that took place as the Baby Jesus was brought into this world, God will reveal His Hand to us.

Look carefully again as this miracle unfolded within the lives of this dear family . . . Mary and Joseph were a part of the family of David. Quirinus ordered a census be taken. Joseph needed to go to his family town of Bethlehem to register. Why? Because God wanted the Baby Jesus to be born there. He had prophesied that very thing hundreds of years earlier, that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. And through the concurring guidance of God's Hand, He brought them to Bethlehem.

And so, they went there to Bethlehem to register, just as Mary was about to give birth. And because of the great crowds coming to register in the census, there was no room available for them in the inns. Again, the concurrence of God's guidance bringing another prophecy to pass.

And folks, while this birth of this baby was almost completely unknown to the people of this earth, it was no small matter in heaven. God was glorified beyond our comprehension.

And so, we see the host of angels announcing the birth to these shepherds, praising God and rejoicing. And though it is not said here, I must believe that the heavens were literally bursting with praise and rejoicing and worship at the birth of this long-awaited Savior of God's chosen people.

And yes, for all that Mary and Joseph would be encountering over the coming years as the Lord Jesus grew and engaged in His ministry to mankind, they needed some immediate encouragement. And they received that encouragement directly from God through these blessed shepherds who came to welcome the birth of this blessed baby.

How can we read these scriptures and not give a resounding praise for the unseen guiding Hand of God? And not only for those days of the birth of the Lord Jesus, but also for now, for these days of our lives as we

experience the presence of God's unseen Hand in the activities of our own lives?

I do encourage each of us, each day, to look for the unseen guiding Hand of God in all the many ordinary matters of our daily lives. He is right here folks, every moment of every day, reaching into and blessing all the circumstances we are involved in. And when He reveals His divine Hand to us, we must always remember to give Him praise and thanks for His blessed provision. Praise the Lord!

. . . Now as we close this message and take part in the blessed sacrament of communion, may I remind us again of what God desires for us within the taking of these elements of the Bread and the Cup.

As we know from the words that Jesus spoke to us during that first communion supper celebrated there in the Upper Room, these elements of the Bread and the Cup represent the precious Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus.

And also, as the words of the Apostle Paul remind us in 1 Corinthians 11.

23 For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, **24** and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." **25** In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." **26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

And dear friends, there is one other reminder that needs be given before we partake of this sacrament. That reminder is given to us here in the following verses of 1 Corinthians 11 where we are told,

27 Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. **28** Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. **29** For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. (1 Corinthians 11:27-29)

So, please, if you need to deal with some matter of unresolved sin in your heart, take care of that matter first.

You may be able to do that now, as you meditate for these next few moments. Perhaps you need to repent for some unresolved anger or bitterness or unforgiveness, or some other sin. If so, please, please do that now. Forgiveness is only one humble prayer of repentance away.

But if it takes more, hold off for today, and then come back another time and take these sacraments. You will be blessed for your faithfulness.

May we pray and then we will partake of this sacrament.