

Stewardship Series: Not a Silent Night

Sermon #1: “Beginning with the End: Mary's Story”

Scripture: Acts 1:8-14 (to be read during the sermon)

Source: Rev. Adam Hamilton at the Church of the Resurrection in Kansas City, MO

<http://www.cor.org/worship/sermon-archives/show/series/Not-a-Silent-Night/>

Opening Video Clip

PP#1: Not a Silent Night

“Beginning with the End: Mary’s Story”

“We will always be with the Lord. So encourage each other with these words.” - 1 Thessalonians 4:18

Not a Silent Night. Beginning with the End: Mary’s Story. 1 Thessalonians 4:18 “We will always be with the Lord. So encourage each other with these words.”

PP#2: “I survived Black Friday” *black t-shirt*, and <http://blackfridaydeathcount.com/>

Christmas officially started at 6 p.m. on Thanksgiving Day. That’s when Wal-Mart opened for Black Friday sales! Poor Thanksgiving, now it’s only part of a day. 281,000 people went through the Mall of America. And people go nuts! Let’s see, fist fight between two women in a Wal-Mart in LasAngels over a Barbie doll, 7 p.m. Thanksgiving. Two men thrown out of a mall in Indianapolis for being aggressive and rowdy. And in Manchester, England, two men got into a fist fight over a TV, four minutes before the sales hit. As it turned out, while they were fighting, a third man came and grabbed the TV! Wow. There’s a web site that tracks the death and significant injuries caused by mean and careless shoppers. Tally this year another death, bringing the current total reached 8 deaths and 96 injuries. And this year, the shopping was significantly down, as so many people are making internet purchases. It’s safer, I guess!

PP#3: *Four images of Mary and Jesus: 1) Nativity, 2) Temple, 3) Cross or Pieta, 4) Ascension*

Here in church, we prepare for Christmas a bit differently. We prepare by looking back into Scripture to see what Christmas is all about. And to do that, over the next few weeks, we’re going to be following the story of Mary. Christmas is about Jesus, but you see, Mary had the best view of Christmas, wouldn’t you say? So, we’re going to take a look at Christmas through Mary’s eyes. We’ll see what Christmas meant to her.

We’re going to do this a bit backwards, actually. We’re going to look at what Christmas meant to Mary at the various points in her life. Today, we’re going to take a look at the end of her life. Then, next Sunday, we’ll look at her when Jesus was crucified. Then, the next week, when she found Jesus at the temple in Jerusalem as a boy, and finally, the week before Christmas, we’ll see her when she gives birth to Jesus. Christmas, you see, is not just a one time event. It happened at all these stages in her life, and we’re going to see Christmas very differently than just what happened that one silent night.

PP#4: “Labor of Love” by Andrew Peterson

It was not a silent night, There was blood on the ground

You could hear a woman cry, On the streets of David's town

It was a labor of pain It was a cold sky above
But for the girl on the ground, It was a labor of love

Well, actually, I don't think it was a silent night. Our sermon title comes from a song by Andrew Peterson, "Labor of Love." He paints a much more realistic picture of that night.

You see, for Mary, Christmas was an intermingling of blessing and pain. And Christmas was that for her throughout her life. I think when we're honest, it's that for us, too. We like to talk only about the joy of Christmas, and it is, for sure. But there is also an intermingling of pain.

PP#5: *Images of Mary's grave in Ephesus, from the outside*

So, we start at the end. We're taking a look at Mary at the end of her life. What does Christmas look like to her, then? Well, there is only one verse in the whole Bible about Mary after Jesus goes back to glory. What do you think happened to Mary after Jesus went back to glory? Have you ever thought about that? What did she do? Where did she go?

Well, the Bible doesn't say. And I hadn't really thought about it until I was leading a tour in Turkey. When we went to Ephesus to see where Paul started the church there, the guide pointed out Mary's tomb on a hill in the distance. What? I had to do some research.

Well, outside the Bible, historical accounts about the early church are sketchy, at best. Remember, the early church was small and persecuted. Most stories say that she lived for 50 years after giving birth to Jesus. So, that means that if she were 14 when Jesus was born, then she would be about 38 when He was crucified, and then she would be 64, 16 years later, when she died. There are two basic traditions about Mary's death. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that when Mary died, her body was taken up into heaven the same day she died. That would mean, it seems to me, that there would be no need for a tomb for her body, right? Well, the Eastern Orthodox church claims that she died and was buried. But on the third day, Jesus raised her from the dead and took her up to glory with Him. So, either way, if she had a tomb, it was soon empty.

PP#6: *Images of Mary's tomb in Ephesus, inside shots.*

Well, one tradition claims that she did go to Ephesus. Remember, while on the cross, Jesus entrusted her to the apostle John? John is said to have gone to Ephesus. That's why when he was arrested and sent into exile, he was sent to Patmos, an island off the coast of Ephesus. Well, about 100 years ago a first century home was discovered there, and it was claimed to be the home of John and Mary. Mary, the story goes, died there, and a chapel was built over the place in her memory.

PP#7: *Images of Mary's tomb in Jerusalem, outside and inside*

A stronger story, however, is that she died in Jerusalem. Near the Garden of Gethsemane is a church built over a cave where Mary was said to have died and was buried.

Well, no matter what story you believe, they all end the same: Mary died, but now she is with Jesus. You see, Mary saw Christmas when she died. She died in the hope of salvation that Jesus brought, hope in His resurrection from the dead, and hope in her resurrection.

PP#8: John 14:1-3

Don't be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me. My Father's house has room to spare. If that weren't the case, would I have told you that I'm going to prepare a place for you? When

I go to prepare a place for you, I will return and take you to be with me so that where I am you will be too.

We have hope in Christmas because of the resurrection from the dead. Christmas and Easter are a package deal, they are the two sides of the same coin. Christmas is about salvation, about resurrection. John 14, Jesus says, “Don’t be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me. My Father’s house has room to spare. If that weren’t the case, would I have told you that I’m going to prepare a place for you? When I go to prepare a place for you, I will return and take you to be with me so that where I am you will be too.”

PP#9: *Image for a blue (sad) Christmas.*

The holidays can be hard if you’re missing loved ones. It’s hard when you have memories of special times with them from past Christmases, and now, this year, they aren’t around anymore. Part of you misses them terribly.

But you know what? We can remember that Christmas is about the hope we have in the resurrection that Jesus brought us. What a great day to miss our loved ones, because on Christmas we can say that we have the hope and joy of knowing that Jesus came to bring resurrection.

Think about how Mary celebrated every Christmas. She must have remembered that night vividly. But she also had terrible memories of watching her Jesus die on the cross. I’m sure those memories always overlapped. Jesus was born. Jesus died. And then, even after His resurrection, Jesus went back to glory. It was amazing, I know, but for Mary it must have brought such grief. She would never get to see Him again in this life.

It’s hard saying goodbye to your child, even if he is an adult. Darlene Wright, a longtime friend of this church, sobbed to me as we buried her son, “No mother should ever have to bury her son!” Some of you here today know that grief. There’s nothing like it.

So, each Christmas after Jesus was taken up, Mary’s thoughts must have flooded with visions of Jesus’ birth, His death, His resurrection, and His ascension. And I’m sure, each year she celebrated Christmas by praying, “I’ll see you again someday!”

What a great way to celebrate Christmas...for us, too. Our Christmas thoughts are flooded with images of Jesus’ birth, His death, His resurrection, and His ascension, and His promise to come some day to take us with Him. We need to celebrate Christmas by praying, “I’ll see you someday, and I’ll see again all the loved ones I miss so much!”

PP#10: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Brothers and sisters, we want you to know about people who have died so that you won’t mourn like others who don’t have any hope. Since we believe that Jesus died and rose, so we also believe that God will bring with Him those who have died in Jesus. . . .First, those who are dead in Christ will rise. Then, we who are living and still around will be taken up together with them in the clouds to meet with the Lord in the air. That way we will always be with the Lord. So encourage each other with these words.

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together with them in the clouds to meet with the Lord in the air. That way we will always be with the Lord. So encourage each other with these words.”

We have hope because we will be with the Lord forever. “So, encourage each other with these words.” This life is not all there is. Yes, terrible things happen here. But one day, Jesus will come back and set everything right. This is the hope and promise that starts at Christmas. When Mary grew old, this is what she remembered about Christmas. This was important to her.

PP#11: *Image of my father*

I remember the first Christmas after my father died. I was 18. Dad loved Christmas, and he was always the center of our celebrations. That Christmas was hard. But that Christmas was also special. For on that day our family gathered together and told the stories of my father’s death. I told how when I drove from Dickenson—this is North Dakota—to Grand Forks to see Dad in the hospital, I had stopped by Crystal Springs, a favorite well of my father’s, 40 miles west of Jamestown. It was July, and I got some of that ice cold, crystal clear well water, and brought it to him. I remembered the twinkle in his eye as he had a sip. After he died, I poured out the rest of the water on his grave, in the form of a cross, as I said, “I’ll see you again someday.” That Christmas, we ended our celebrations with my mom reminding us that because of the true meaning of Christmas, my father was not dead, and that we will one day see him again! It was a great Christmas!

PP#12: *Image of the resurrected Jesus and Mary, not Easter*

I wonder what the last thing was that Jesus said to Mary before He ascended. It was hard for her, I’m sure. But I bet as they hugged, He whispered in her ear, “I’ll see you again some day.” And I bet that as Mary got older, she remembered that when she celebrated Christmas. And as she thought about her own death, I’m sure Christmas gave her the confidence of joy in her resurrection and in seeing Jesus again.

PP#13: *Image of an aging Mary.*

Well, what about those last years of her life? What do you think she was doing those last 16 years? What would have filled her biography?

Remember, Mary was there when Jesus went back to glory. Matthew records the Great Commission, “Go into all the world making disciples in my name.” Acts records some additional words. 1:8 “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Mary was there to hear it. Then, Acts goes on to mention, for the last time, Mary in the Bible. It’s a fleeting reference, but as we hear it, listen for what is going on when she’s mentioned. Acts 1:12-14

PP#14: Acts 1:12-14

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, which is near Jerusalem—a sabbath day’s journey away. When they entered the city, they went to the upstairs room where they were staying. Peter, John, James, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James, Alphaeus’ son; Simon the zealot; and Judas, James’ son—all were united in their devotion to prayer, along with some women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and His brothers.

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So, there you have it, the last reference to Mary. Jesus gives the charge to go make disciples and to be His witnesses, but wait for the Holy Spirit to come first. They go back into Jerusalem, go to the upper room, probably the same one they had the Last Supper in, and they wait in prayer. They are praying together, including Mary.

PP#15: *Image of Pentecost, with Mary, if possible.*

Well, the next chapter tells us that 10 days later, the Holy Spirit came upon everyone in the upper room. There were about 120 there that day, including, evidently, Mary. And the rest of Acts tells about how Jesus’ followers lived out His Commission to make disciples and be His witnesses.

What do you think Mary spent the last 16 years of her life doing?

I think she spent it doing what Jesus had called her to do! She adopted His mission and tried to live out what He had asked her to do.

I bet she told the stories of Christmas, and Easter, and everything in between, like no one else could. She told about the hope she had in His resurrection, and for her own. And I bet that everyone she told experienced an inner joy, and peace, and hope, like never before. “Joy to the world,” “Peace on earth,” “Hope is born.” Christmas was fulfilled as Mary spoke.

PP#16: *Images of a candle light service, with everyone holding lit candles.*

At Christmas the Light was born into the world. That’s why we have a candlelight service on Christmas Eve. And what we do is we all have candles, and the light from the Christ candle is passed around and shared. The Light of Christmas is for each of us, shining in us. And those who have the light turn and share it with those near them. Those who have the Light share it.

What is the best way to celebrate Jesus’ birthday? I can tell you it is not fighting over discounted Barbie dolls! I think it has more to do with what Mary did. She shared His light. She told others what He meant to her. She reached out and cared for her neighbor, just like He had told her to.

PP#17: Christmas Through Mary’s Eyes

Doing what Jesus wants done.

This year, as we see Christmas through Mary’s eyes, let’s celebrate by sharing light with our neighbors. We are the hope of Christ in our world. How can you offer hope, encouragement, joy? Can you include some acts of kindness or service to your preparations and celebrations? How can you do what Jesus wants done? What would that look like?

The mission of Christmas is not to get as much stuff as you can for your loved ones. It’s to be people of hope who let His light shine, to act as His witnesses so others can see Him in us.

Let’s start preparing for Christmas, right now. Let’s plan to celebrate it the way He wants His birthday celebrated. Let’s commit to fulfill His mission. Let’s live as people of the Light. Let’s do what Jesus wants done.

Prayer...