

CCMC Weekly 55
December 19, 2016

Dear Christ Community,

There is a story (as told by Brennen Manning) where St. Francis and Brother Leo were walking down the road. St. Francis noticed Brother Leo's depressed mood, and asked him what it meant to be pure of heart. Brother Leo talked about having no sins or faults. St. Francis said "No wonder you sad. We will always have something to reproach ourselves for." Leo concurred. St. Francis responded, "Listen carefully to me. Don't be so preoccupied with the purity of your heart. Turn and look at Jesus. Admire him. Rejoice that he is what he is--your brother, your friend, your Lord and Savior. That, little brother, is what it means to be pure of heart. And once you've turned to Jesus, don't turn back and look at yourself. Don't wonder where you stand with him."

He goes on to talk about how this focus on oneself as being perfect can almost be idolatry, and that we should be focusing on the beauty and graciousness of Christ. Certainly the Lord demands our efforts and fidelity, but holiness is not a personal achievement. Rather it is an emptiness that cries out, God alone is the Holy One, God alone is Lord.

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LAST SUNDAY

We read Matthew 1:18-26 (read it at <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%201:18-25>). In this scripture, Mary is found to be pregnant, and as Joseph prepares to quietly break off the engagement, he experiences a dream where an angel tells him not to be afraid to take Mary as a wife, that her child is of the Holy Spirit, and this is all part of God's plan for the baby to save people from their sins. From this familiar story, we gather these timeless truths:

1. Mary and Joseph were ordinary people facing ordinary scandals, just like us, but they had amazing faith. We can look at scandals as opportunities to draw closer to God, and know that the work of God in the world is scandalous to the standards of society.
2. Joseph's clarity and resolve to move forward. Sometimes in life we just have to keep moving forward, trust our decisions and go with them. If he can welcome a

son that is not biologically his, surely we are called to that level of grace and beyond, which only is a fraction of God's.

3. Make room for miracles. When God sends you an angel, don't doubt it. You don't have to know everything all at once, but we can rely on God to help us through

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NEXT SUNDAY

Merry Christmas! We will have regular worship service but no Sunday School as people may want to get to their families and festivities. Our scripture is Luke 2:8-20:

8In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and 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 heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" 15When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." 16So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. 17When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; 18and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. 19But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. 20The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

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STUDY QUESTIONS

- Think about all the references to shepherds that we have in scripture. What particular significance do they have? Who is a shepherd these days?
- Why did the angels tell the shepherds?
- What are the different emotions and thoughts you imagine the shepherds experiencing?
- Do you think the shepherds went in belief or disbelief?

-Think of those who heard the shepherds' words. Were they surprised? How did they receive this information?

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Also please come to the parsonage on Christmas Eve at 7pm for our cookie & story exchange and singing. I have asked folks to bring in a memory or story related to Christmas. It will be a small group but please come if you are able! Have a great week. Stay warm.

Love,
Amy