

## The Deep Faith of the Less Famous – December 6, 2020

INTRODUCTION — the advent and Christmas season is a blessed time for children. However, they don't always get the details right. Case in point: in Minnesota, where many people have Swedish ancestry, one five-year-old girl was helping set the table one Sunday afternoon near Christmas. She stopped for a moment and announced to her mother, "Jesus was a Swede." More than a little surprised, mom corrected her, "oh, no, dear, Jesus was Jewish. I'll read it to you from the bible after lunch." Pensively, she laid out the silverware. Then her face brightened. "Mommy, I can prove it to you! We sang about it in Sunday school this morning." Triumphantly she sang, "Away in a manger, no crib for a bed, the little lord Jesus lay down his swede head." Speaking of European ancestry, Adam, a bright-eyed 3-year-old, had been told of his German heritage. After church in early December, his dad asked him if he had a part in the Sunday school Christmas pageant. "Yes," he replied, his eyes filling with joy. "I am going to be a German shepherd!"

Even teenagers get into the act. Anita Heistand, of Galena, Kansas, told of how her church used a small donkey from a nearby farm for their Christmas pageant, which ran four evenings in a row. Elvis, the donkey, was well-mannered and a popular member of the cast. Each evening, Elvis's owner brought him to church in a pickup truck before the pageant. Anita said, "one evening as my teen-aged daughter, Janette, and I walked across the church parking lot, I saw the donkey being unloaded from the truck. I said brightly to Janette, 'oh, there's Elvis!' " Janette, evidently tired of baby boomers and their Elvis Presley sightings, looked at me with sorrowful surprise. "Oh, mom, not you, too." We are looking this season at "witnesses of his coming." The witnesses we want to look at this morning are not major characters in the Christmas story, because they only appear in the gospel of Luke. However, I think we will see that Zechariah and Elizabeth can teach us that God will use anyone who is faithful and obedient to bring about his will. Now, wait a minute, you might say. Are there:

I. Minor characters in the Christmas story ? ?

1. The story of Zechariah and Elizabeth — the future parents of John the baptizer.

2. ( re— tell their story . . . . . )

3. How do they fit into the Christmas stories?? John the Baptist:

A. The prophet Malachi tells us that Elijah would come before the messiah would appear. ( read Malachi 3:1, 4:5 ) b. Jesus said that John is / was Elijah: Matt. 17: 10—13 ( read )

II. Are there “ minor characters” in the story of life?

1. No !!! There are no “minor characters” in God’s plan for humanity !!! Every person — everyone here this morning — is immensely important to God !!!

2. But — what about most of us?? Few of us are major characters in the drama of the history of God’s people !! Zechariah and Elizabeth did what they could, being as faithful as they could ( after Zech.’s original disbelief ) to carry out God’s will.

3. Major characters are like John the baptizer; Peter and Paul, the apostles; Martin Luther , the great German reformer of the church in the 1500's, who got the protestant reformation started; John Wesley , the great British preacher and reformer who got the first great awakening or revival started in England and the colonies of North America, what became the new United States, and then what became the Methodist churches of America and England. These and many others: Augustine, John Calvin, John Knox in Scotland, Jonathan Edwards in the northeast US, great bishops and preachers too many to name— these are some of the major characters in the history of God’s great invasion into earth, in the church of Jesus Christ our Lord.

4. What about the rest of us? Are we just: chopped liver? No!!!

5. Normal, regular Christians — we are normal believers — God wants us to live a “ normal ” Christian life.

### III. How to live the “normal” Christian life

1. The lesson on this is Zechariah’s and Elizabeth’s lives, which exemplify the later writing of the apostles.

2. In Zechariah, we see: after initial disbelief, he had trust and obedience to God. ( 1: 62 )

3. In Elizabeth, whose voice we do not hear until months later, when Mary went to visit her, months after Elizabeth had become pregnant — in Elizabeth we see: devotion and openness to the Holy Spirit .

4. Other characteristics shared by Zechariah and Elizabeth are spelled out later in the apostles’ letters, such as Paul’s letter to the Philippian Christians, chapter 2: ( read . . . . )

5. V. 2 — being like-minded , which means: unity ! (tell story of member at St. Mark in Knoxville., who voted against the new fellowship hall, but supported it when he lost).

6. V. 3 — do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit;

7. V. 3— instead, act out of humility , which means: consider others as better than yourselves .

8. V. 4 — look out for the interests of others , also these were all characteristics of Elizabeth and Zechariah

9. V. 5 ---- who is the prime example of this attitude? Our example is: Jesus Christ . For the rest of what Paul wrote in chapter 2, he spelled out why Jesus is the perfect example to follow,

because of the incarnation — God becoming flesh . And the incarnation is what the story of Christmas is all about.

Conclusion — leaders from prison fellowship ministries ( for men and women in prison ), along with several other Christian leaders once met with president Borja of Ecuador (in South America) to discuss prison fellowship international's ministry in Ecuadorian prisons penitentiaries). They had no sooner been seated in luxurious leather chairs when the president interrupted the conversation with the story of his own imprisonment years before being elected to the presidency. He had been involved in the struggle for democracy in Ecuador. The military cracked down, and he was arrested. Without trial, they threw him into a cold dungeon with no light and no window. For three days he endured the solitary fear and darkness that can drive a person mad.

Just when the situation seemed unbearable, and as Christmas that year drew near, the huge steel door opened, and someone crept into the darkness. Borja heard the person working on something in the opposite corner. Then the figure crept out, closed the door, and disappeared. Minutes later the room suddenly blazed with light. Someone, perhaps taking his life into his hands, had connected electricity to the broken light fixture. "From that moment," explained president Borja, "my imprisonment had meaning because at least i could see. I was able to make a defense, and ultimately obtain freedom— all because i had the light." Even more important than the light we see with our eyes is the light that Jesus Christ brings to our hearts, giving our lives the understanding, the meaning, and the freedom that only he can give. That is why God sent his son and invaded our world in the incarnation — that we might have light to live in freedom, trust and obedience and devotion like Zechariah and Elizabeth, and humility and unity as the apostles tell us, and as Jesus himself gave us the perfect example.

1) Are you ready to believe in Jesus as your savior?? Will you commit your life to him???

2) Do you want Jesus to be real to you, every day??