

Why the Christmas Story Is Much More Pentecostal Than You'd Think

The danger of experiencing Christmas year after year is it becomes "normal." We begin to feel like the Christmas story is more like another Hallmark channel movie with a predictable happy ending. Nothing against Hallmark movies (my wife is a big fan), but the story of Jesus' birth is closer to a nuclear explosion sent from heaven, with the aftershocks still being felt today.

One way that we see this is, even though it is hiding in plain sight, is to look at the Gospel of Luke. We are helped past our familiarity with the story by looking at it through the lens of the wonderful foreshadowing that he is doing in setting up his second volume, Acts. The lives of the people in the next book will experience a paradigm-shattering experience of life in the Spirit, and Luke is setting the stage right out of the gate here in his first book. Here are some of the lessons from the Christmas story

The Bringing of the Spirit and the Prophetic

In the Old Testament, the operation of the gifts was with special people and for the moment, but now, things are changing. Zechariah is prophesying and Mary is singing with outbursts of praise. Mary, Elizabeth and even John the Baptist in his mother's womb are filled with the Spirit. As Bob Dylan would sing, "The Times, They Are a-Changin'." We had better hold on, because things are just getting started.

An Eruption of the Miraculous

We have probably been to too many Christmas programs where little boys and girls get to play the part of angels. When the

people in the Christmas story saw angels, they freaked out a little. The shepherds in the field saw one angel and were terrified. We can only imagine what they felt when they saw a multitude of them. But in the Bible story of Christmas, the miraculous seems to be everywhere with angels and dreams and stars of direction in the sky. Are we ready to get in on the story of Christmas today?

The Involvement of the Unexpected

My home-church pastor made a good point this week when he pointed out that outsiders get invited into the story of Christmas. If Mary was a teenage mom and Elizabeth was a senior citizen, they would have made an unusual pair. Shepherds with no names get a personal invitation to the story. And the story of Jesus' birth reminds us that even foreigners get involved with wise men from another land getting to be a part. Jesus even gets to experience life as an immigrant in the story of the Bible. No nice neat bows on the end here. Pentecostals have traditionally been for the down-and-out person and the outsider, and it starts with Christmas.

Prayer: The Engine That Keeps the Story Going

When Luke starts his story and Zechariah goes in to be with God, Luke makes the point that "the whole crowd of people were praying outside" (1:10). This will be a lesson he goes back to again and again through his two books. When the people give themselves to prayer, God shows up. Prayer drives us into the mission of God. Right from the beginning, the prayers of God's people are sprinkled in.

The heart-pounding fact about Christmas is that it was a starting point for a way for us to interact with God. He will take ordinary, fragile and broken people and use them as they are filled with the Spirit. Will you be one of them? {eo}

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