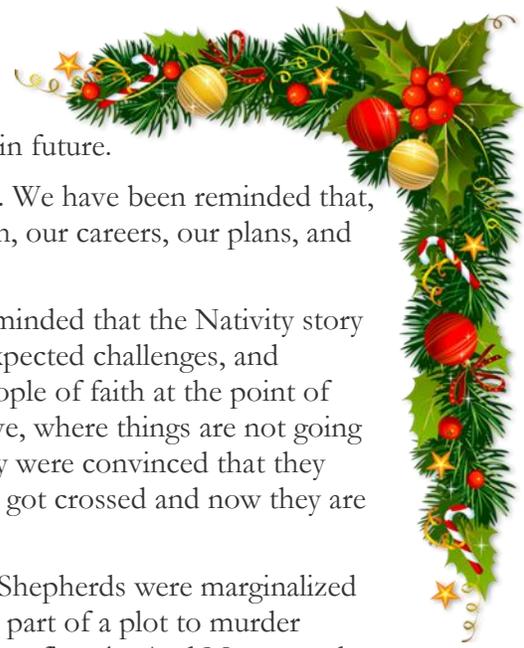


## Merry Christmas 2020!



Unmet expectations. Unexpected challenges. Uncertain future.

2020 has been a year unlike any other in our lifetimes. We have been reminded that, no matter how secure we may think we are, our health, our careers, our plans, and our lives are not under our control.

As Christmas has drawn closer, we have also been reminded that the Nativity story from the Bible is filled with unmet expectations, unexpected challenges, and uncertainty. The story of Christmas is the story of people of faith at the point of crisis. They are in a place where it's not easy to believe, where things are not going the way we thought they were going to go, where they were convinced that they knew what God had in mind, but somehow the wires got crossed and now they are in crisis. Think about it:

Zacharias and Elizabeth were unable to have a child. Shepherds were marginalized by their own culture. The Wise Men were unwittingly part of a plot to murder innocent children. Joseph was confronted by a pregnant fiancée. And Mary – at the center of it all. Instead of a pristine Christmas-card fantasy, for them the events surrounding the birth of Christ were filled with stress, misunderstanding, confusion and unmet expectations.

Here is the legacy of “the most blessed among all women”:

- From the day that angel showed up, fast-forward three months to the public discovery of her pregnancy – “This is what it means to be blessed?”
- From the day that angel showed up, fast-forward nine months to a dirty, smelly stable in Bethlehem – “This is what it means to be the recipient of God’s blessing?”
- From the day that angel showed up, fast-forward thirty-three years to the foot of a Roman cross bearing the bloodied, nearly unrecognizable form of her first-born son.

“This is the one who will ‘reign over the house of Jacob forever?’ This is God’s plan?” Mary didn’t know. What she *thought* she knew about the Messiah was probably as mistaken as the thoughts of every other Jew in Israel at the time. “Freedom from the Romans! A king in Israel who will rule the world!” Anything but a Suffering Servant...

When Gabriel showed up, and startled her with his amazing news, she had no idea all that lay ahead... Which makes her faithfulness all the more impressive! We do not disrespect Mary by asserting that she did not know the end of the story when it began – We marvel at the faith of this young, teen-aged girl, and her life of faith even when things didn’t go according to her plan or expectations!

So, how do we face our most challenging Christmas (so far!)?

Just like they did... With humble, obedient, worshipful, trusting hearts. When things don’t go according to plan, when our expectations are unmet, when life is uncertain, let’s respond like Mary:

“I am the Lord’s servant,  
may the Lord act according to His word.”

Love & prayers as we journey together,



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