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Pataskala Church of the Nazarene  
December 9, 2007

## The Faith of Christmas

**Text: Luke 1:1-9**

**Intro:**

As we come into the second Sunday of the Christmas Advent season I hope that each and every one of us holds firmly to the promises of God.

Christmas is all about the coming of Christ over 2,000 years ago and the soon imminent return of Christ, just as it is promised in the Word of God.

Who do teenagers look up to the most, who do most teenagers have faith in?

Parents, you will be glad to hear that on the surveys I read on the internet this past week, you were on the top of the list.

You are their biggest role model, although they probably wouldn't say that to your face.

Unfortunately, by the actions of many youth, it seems they have other role models as well because they are concerned with popularity, looks, having cool stuff, wearing the "in" clothes, and or even having a certain talent.

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Even though all of these things, and all of the role models change from year to year.

The person who was cool and looked up to last year is no longer cool anymore.

Someone is younger, prettier, and more talented comes along.

Other than their parents, I wonder why our kid's role models can't be an ordinary person, who was extraordinary not because of who they are on the outside but because of who they are on the inside.

Ironically, the most popular woman who ever lived is rarely looked upon as a role model.

She was not wealthy.

The Bible doesn't tell us that she was beautiful even though Hollywood had to make her look beautiful in the movie, "**The Nativity Story**"

She was probably not well educated in today's standards.

She was unknown outside of her home town during most of her lifetime.

Yet she had an inner beauty that even impressed God!

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Her inner beauty was so powerful that she was chosen to become the mother of the most important person of all times: God's own Son, Jesus.

Of course we are talking about Mary, and the inner beauty that impressed God and should inspire us as our role model, whether we are teens or adults, was Mary's faith and obedience to God.

As our second candle was lit this morning it represents the Candle of Faith.

### **I. Mary is a tremendous example of faith.**

She bears up under one of the heaviest loads that God has ever asked a woman to endure.

Bearing God's Son was the greatest thing that ever happened to any woman, and yet, there must have been times when it did not seem great at all.

It probably challenged her faith.

It must, in fact, have seemed like a nightmare.

In the beginning, there was an angel to reassure her and explain what was going to happen, but there were not always angels.

There must have been times of great shame and desperate loneliness; times when God seemed all too silent.

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The heavens were devoid of angels.

There were times of quiet wondering about God's will, for His will seemed to be very difficult.

And indeed it was.

Too often as we think about what it means to be a Christian, and to follow God's will, we think in fairy tale terms as we do with the Christmas story.

We think about living happily ever after.

And then, when the reality that God's will is not always easy sets in, **we are unprepared.**

It comes unexpectedly.

The greatest thing that ever happened to two people happened to Mary and Joseph, but there were times when God's plan for them seemed difficult... very, very difficult.

Times when they must have wondered why God allowed things to happen as they did.

Two thousand years later we now can see how wonderful it was, but at the time it was hard for them to see.

And listen wouldn't you agree with me Believer friend, two thousand years from now the difficulties

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we face will be understood completely in the light of God's will for us.

**It will be easy then to see how wonderful it was, but now is the important time to be strong and not to lose faith, to believe in God's plan for your life, difficult life that it may be.**

Peter wrote these important words to us: ***“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed”*** (1 Peter 4:12).

What began as a holiday voyage in the Caribbean a few years ago turned into a living nightmare for longtime friends Fared Suraleigh and Herbert Clarity.

The men were anticipating a relaxing sailing outing, but their plans were violently altered by swirling 70-knot winds, 40-foot waves, relentless rain and an overturned sail boat.

The two managed to climb onto a six-foot raft, but were forced to sit waist-deep in freezing water pumping air into their quickly deflating dinghy, which had a hole in one of its tubes.

Clinging to the rubber raft with water seeping in and air leaking out for 12 harrowing hours, the men

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were finally rescued by a Japanese merchant ship.

What the men didn't realize was that during their ordeal, the pilot of a Coast Guard jet had kept an eye on them.

He identified their exact location for the Japanese freighter that rescued them.

The men, both in good condition, flew home the next week with a story that would shiver the timbers of the most hardened seafarer.

But there were other eyes upon them besides those of the coast guard, **and the eyes of God are on you and me as well.**

He sees.

He knows.

He cares.

He is there. Hallelujah!

Andrew Murray, a great Christian of another generation, wrote these words which have been a great help to me personally:

**IN TIME OF TROUBLE SAY:**

**First —**

He brought me here. It is by his will I am in this strait place; in that will I rest.

**Next —**

He will keep me in his love and give me grace in this trial to behave as his child.

**Then —**

He will make the trial a blessing, teaching me the lessons He means me to learn, and working in me the grace He intends for me.

**Last —**

In His good time He can bring me out again, how and when He knows.

**I am here by:**

- 1. By God's appointment.**
- 2. In God's keeping**
- 3. Under His training.**
- 4. For His time.**

Friend, God's will for your life is wonderful, but that does not mean it will always be easy.

And while we get excited about Christmas, it's not a fairy tale story.

Sometimes God's blessings are disguised in very difficult circumstances, but that's the way it was two thousand years ago, and that's still the way it is today.

And again 2,000 years from now, we'll understand and as the old song goes, **"We'll understand it better by and by."**

I want to take you to I Cor. 1 and verse 9 where it literally shouts at us, **"God is faithful!"**

***"God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful."***

**We've talked about the faithfulness of Mary and it wouldn't be complete unless we seen the faithfulness of God.**

## **II. God is Faithful!**

At this time we celebrate the Birth of the Christ-Child.

But we are also immediately reminded that as He came the first time, He will coming again, as it is prophesized and promised in God's Word.

Central to all Paul has to say to this church in Corinth that he is aware that they ***"wait for the coming of Christ."***

***In verse 8 "God will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."***

And really believer friends, we should have as our central theme the fact that Jesus is Coming Again!

**As our theme for this Advent is from the Cradle to the Cross, we are excited to celebrate the birth of Christ and yet we are subdued when we think about what happened to our Messiah on the Cross.**

You see – the crucifixion of Christ had happened, this was an event in the past and now the people were anticipating Jesus Christ Coming Again!

You see we can't seriously and sincerely celebrate the birth of Christ without including the Coming of Christ again.

And how well would that description fit us this morning?

I mean do we really believe and could it be possible that Jesus could actually return soon, I mean today, next week, next month, before this year comes to a conclusion?

## **II. Because of our Faith, we have been given Grace.**

For many in America, Christmas has nothing to do with Christ, but is just another attempt at filling an unfillable void with gadgets and gizmos, diamonds and furs, food and drink, things that will not fulfill.

And, there will be those who sit around a Christmas tree looking at all the torn wrapping paper, ribbons and bows totally empty, because their life is devoid of God.

They feel just as empty as those early believers must have felt before they met Jesus.

How many people in this world have had everything that money could buy and still felt empty?

You read about suicides during this time of the year.

One rock star who had fame, money, relationships, anything that he wanted, killed himself, leaving a note saying, "is there nothing more?"

There is something more.

## **The answer is simple – The answer is God!**

To that Mall sniper this past week, the answer was simple for his life – The answer would have been Jesus.

There is Jesus and the salvation that He offers.

What makes us different as believers is that God is at work in a unique way in our lives.

Jesus is living His life in us and through us.

Paul's testimony to the people of Corinth was faithful and true.

Listen to what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:4-6 **"I always thank God for you because of His grace given you in Christ Jesus. 5 For in Him you have been enriched in every way--in all your speaking and in all your knowledge-- 6 because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you"**

What Paul preached to them was confirmed in their lives.

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Sometimes people think, “Well if I accept Christ, then everything will be great and all my problems will go away.”

That might not be the case at all.

### **Transition:**

While Christmas to us is that wonderful time when we become involved with beautiful decorations, lights, colorful packages, and once again hear the magical story of the birth of the Christ-child: Angels visiting the earth.

Wise men following an unusual star in the sky, a beautiful mother and proud father (both with halos), clean sheep, and a sweet smelling stable.

A lovely picture!

But that is a side of Christmas that is unrealistic. That is the fairy tale side of what really happened.

In spite of the fact that it was the most wonderful thing that had ever happened on earth, there were times when it didn't seem that way, especially for a young 16-year-old girl who was now mysteriously pregnant.

And everything did not seem wonderful to a young man who was beginning to wonder about the girl he thought was so decent and good.

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He wanted to do the right thing, even though custom would have permitted him to have her stoned to death.

For Mary and Joseph it was wonderful, and yet it was disastrous and they needed God's Grace.

There must have been many times when they asked the question: “Why couldn't we have had normal lives, and normal children, like everyone else?”

It begins wonderfully.

Mary has a special visit from the angel Gabriel to give her the glad news of what was about to happen to her.

He told her that she was a favored person, and blessed among women.

The angel said to her, **“Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.... The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God”** (Luke 1:30-35).

It sounded wonderful, but she was still confused and frightened.

It helped her to go to her relative Elizabeth's home in another town for awhile.

They were a comfort to each other.

The only trouble was that after staying at Elizabeth's for several months she had to return to her own home, and it was now obvious that she was very pregnant.

How the tongues must have wagged when she returned to her town.

It was great that God sent an angel to her to explain how and why she was pregnant, but no one else in town got the message.

You can almost feel with Mary the looks out of the side of people's eyes; the whispers as she walked past a small group of people.

You can feel with Joseph as his friends smirked, or sympathized with him in order to get more information about what had happened.

You can feel his hurt as he knew what people were saying about the girl he loved and was planning to marry.

You can feel his confusion and anger.

Finally, God spoke to him in a dream.

The angel of the Lord said, "**Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins**" (Matthew 1:20,21).

He had been thinking of breaking the engagement — of quietly setting Mary aside, but now the dream had convinced him otherwise.

It had not convinced anyone else, but it had convinced him.

If you have ever been gossiped about you can imagine what this couple went through.

Sometimes people think, "Well if I accept Christ, I'll have such a carefree life and all my problems will be over."

That is not the case at all.

While receiving Christ is when the joy begins in our lives, it does not mean we will not have troubles and trials.

**Here was this great plan that God had for Mary and Joseph's life.**

They were the most privileged couple who had ever lived, and this is what they had to go through.

Imagine how Mary felt as she knew not only of what other people were saying, and how they felt, but what her emotions must have been as she realized what Joseph felt and what he was thinking.

There was no way she could have explained so that people would have understood.

She was innocent and yet thought of as cheap.

It is bad enough when what everyone is saying about you is true, but it is much worse when they are wrong.

This wonderful plan of God had nearly disgraced her.

It almost ruined her chance for marriage.

It did take away any chance for a normal life.

Imagine the kind of woman she must have been to go through it as well as she did.

**What kind of faith she must have had to withstand everything and not be bitter toward**

**people and angry at what God was putting her through.**

It took a special person.

Every woman must have dreams of having her first child, and she wants that child to be born in the best of circumstances.

But something happened to shatter those dreams.

Caesar declared a census.

They had to take a long trip to the place from where Joseph's ancestors came so they could be taxed.

When you have a full-term pregnancy it is bad enough to take a trip to the hospital with a nervous husband, let alone take a donkey ride for over seventy unbearable miles.

It is no wonder her labor started.

No woman in her right mind would want to undergo a trip like that near the time she was to deliver.

But, circumstances being what they were, that is exactly what Mary had to do.

And she did not go into a clean hospital with a comfortable bed and sterile delivery room with professional medical personnel at her side.

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Of all the dirty places in the world, she delivered in a stable, a barn right next to the cows, the sheep, the donkeys and whatever else may have been there.

There were no pain killers.

Her cries were muffled only by the noise of the animals.

What must have been going through her mind as she was in labor laying in the straw and stench of the stable?

God's will must have seemed mysterious indeed.

One of the things that we learn from the Christmas story is that God does not always conform to human expectations.

God often reveals Himself in unexpected ways.

And one of our problems is that the Christmas story has become so familiar that we have lost the impact of what really happened.

Psalm 34:8 says, ***“O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusts in Him”*** (KJV).

You see you don't have to just take my word for it, taste and see.

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But at the same time it says, ***“Blessed is the one who trusts in Him.”***

This takes us back to the faithfulness of God. God will stand by you just as He stood beside Mary and Joseph in the time of their needs and in spite of all the frustration and confusion they experienced joy.

How many people today who celebrate Christmas are actually celebrating his First Coming?

How many people in America today look forward to His Second Coming?

How many people today really even think about their faith as they think about Christmas?

#### **IV. Because of our Faith, we can be found blameless because God is faithful.**

1 Corinthians 1:8-9 ***“He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful”*** (NIV).

**God is faithful! God will give us His Grace. God will finish what He started.**

His promise of salvation started at the manger.

What He has in store for us in the future is beyond our wildest imagination.

One day Jesus will return to consummate all of His purposes.

Until that time we are kept by the power of God.

No demon from hell can snatch you or me out of God's hand.

The devil himself can't do it.

No circumstance we face, no problem, no difficulty, to tragedy, nor anything else has the power to destroy what God has begun in us.

In Christ Jesus you and I are invincible.

The enemy of our faith, Satan, is described in the Word "**...as a roaring lion seeking those whom he may devour.**"

Through Christ's birth and death on the cross, from the cradle to the cross, Satan's teeth have been broken and his claws torn out.

According to the Word of God, if we "**draw near to God and resist the Devil, he will flee from us.**"

My friend, if you don't know Christ as your Lord and Savior, there is no better day than today to receive him.

Mary was faithful!

## **God is faithful.**

We, as believers celebrate His First Coming through Advent.

You can become a believer today and truly celebrate with us beginning this morning.

We sing and we light candles and we take communion.

And some day soon we will meet Him at an hour unexpected.

Are you ready for His coming?

Wouldn't you like to join the Family of God in anticipation of His next Coming?

'Twas the night before Jesus came and all through the house

Not a creature was praying, not one in the house.  
Their Bibles were laid on the shelf without care  
In hopes that Jesus would not come there.

The children were dressing to crawl into bed,  
Not once ever kneeling or bowing a head.  
And Mom in her rocker with baby on her lap  
Was watching the Late Show while I took a nap.

When out of the East there arose such a clatter,  
I sprang to my feet to see what was the matter.  
Away to the window I flew like a flash

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Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash!

When what to my wondering eyes should appear  
But angels proclaiming that Jesus was here.  
With a light like the sun sending forth a bright ray  
I knew in a moment this must be THE DAY!

The light of His face made me cover my head  
It was Jesus returning just like He had said.  
And though I possessed worldly wisdom and  
wealth,  
I cried when I saw Him in spite of myself.

In the Book of Life, which was held in His hand,  
Was written the name of every saved man.  
He spoke not a word as He searched for my name;  
When He said "It's not here" my head hung in  
shame.

The people whose names had been written with  
love  
He gathered to take to His Father above.  
With those who were ready He rose without a  
sound  
While all the rest were left standing around.

I fell to my knees, but it was too late;  
I had waited too long and thus sealed my fate.  
I stood and I cried as they rose out of sight;  
Oh, if only I had been ready tonight.

In the words of this poem the meaning is clear;  
The coming of Jesus is drawing near.

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There's only one life and when comes the last call  
We'll find that the Bible was true after all!

### **Invitation**

Our God is faithful!

We can know Jesus Christ on a personal and  
intimate level.

Would you want to know Him this morning?