

God's Plan

Journey Through the Dark

Luke 2:1-5

EXPLORING THE SERMON

- * What did you hear?
- * What did you think or feel about what you heard?
- * What is one thing you can take away from the sermon this week?

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURE

*1 In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. **Luke 2:1-5***

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

This passage of scripture is usually read on Christmas Eve, as we remember the days leading up to Jesus' birth. Studying it during the third week of Advent give us the opportunity to see more of Mary's journey, and how we might relate.

Consider each of the elements Mary faced along the way to Bethlehem:

- * Physical toll of the journey
- * Leaving behind community
- * First impressions from Joseph's extended family in Bethlehem
- * Roman oppression dictated their trip

Certainly this was different from the path Mary expected. When our own path starts looking differently, it is important for us to not doubt our call. We might not know the details of our call, but we can trust that we each have a calling. **How do you think Mary was able to continue to trust the message from God that she would bear the Messiah? How have you doubted your own call when your path has started looking different?**

It is important for us to hear this story and be reminded that God's purpose is being worked out in our lives and the world. Often this comes in the form of wandering paths that don't seem to make much sense. **What parts of your life feel confusing, a mistake, or lost time right now? Though it might seem that we're all wandering through the dark right now how can you be reminded that this is part of your journey?**

It is fitting for us to be encouraged during this third week of Advent by the candle of joy. This candle burns to remind us that God's purpose is being worked out in the world and it is trustworthy and true, even when it is hard to understand. Of the many ways to think about joy, perhaps the most fitting description is "the presence of purpose." **How have you been able to distinguish joy from happiness through the journey of this year? How do you see God's purpose for you being worked out?**

Heavenly Father, thank you for the precious life of Mary. Like her, we often find ourselves on a journey that doesn't feel anything like what we expected. We trust that we are not wandering alone, and we pray to be able to see the purpose You have for each of us in this world. Instill in each of us joy this week, as we cling to your promise that you, Emmanuel, are indeed God with us. Amen.