

Series: **CHRISTMAS CLASSICS - December 23 & 24, 2007**

THE STABLE...IN AN *UNSTABLE* WORLD

Luke 2:1-20

I. INTRO

- A. I think we could've won on **America's Funniest Home Videos** if someone had been recording the whole fiasco. It was almost 20 years ago, and the youth had erected a massive wood and fabric structure at the front of the church to do a "shadow play" of the Christmas story. It was a very charming presentation. Well done, really.

-Suddenly, right in the middle of the whole thing, someone bumped the super-structure. It swayed for what seemed like a whole minute—then slowly toppled forward—smashing down across the pulpit and altar.

-Crouched behind were all these kids, their eyes wide with surprise—holding up sticks with wise men, camels, shepherds—and, of course, Mary, Joseph and Jesus all got their own stick. The sound...and then the silence was deafening. Until one little kid started to laugh out loud—"Ha, ha, ha, ha! It all fell down!" The bratty little kids was joined by other's uncontained chuckles and snorts as the Youth Pastor ran up and tried to save the day. It was tragic—but was it ever **funny!** Except for the fact that some of the teens never believed in Christmas again! Actually, that didn't happen.

- B. I sometimes wonder if that's how a lot of our world sees the core story of Christmas. It's cute, it's warm, it's folksy. But if you push on the story too hard, the whole superstructure will crumble—and reveal a shadow play.
How to you live by **truth** that's not really **true?**

1. We live in a **very** unstable world where it sometimes feels like **everything's** up for grabs. Things sometimes **feel** solid. That is, until technology changes; until the Loonie takes another dive; until we get a bad health report; or a plane flies into a tower; or a relationship we've counted on falls apart.
-Most of you, like me, have personally experienced that shaky, panicky feeling in your stomach—sometimes the terror of feeling that everything you counted on has changed.
2. This Christmas, 2007, with so many balls still in the air in our world—my gift to you is truth. The truth about peace and stability--all wrapped up in a tiny squalling package. A baby born under humiliating circumstances into a world just as unstable as ours. It's the story of Jesus—and it's not a shadow play. It's so real you can hang your whole future on it!

II. OUR WORLD...AND THEIRS

- A. Anyone here ever think to yourself, "You know—**I** could do with a little more stability in my world!"

1. Our longing for stability is frustrated by change. In our world, change is relentless. Doesn't it seem like almost every week, **something** changes? From what's healthy—to what's about to melt down the world.

-Our longing for stability is also frustrated by a world system where oppression and hatred and racism and fundamentalism always seems to be bubbling under the surface—waiting to erupt in chaos. And somebody somewhere is **always** trying to grab power—no matter how many people get squashed and killed.

You think we'd learn our lesson by looking at history wouldn't you? We're slow learners!

2. Looking around, it would almost seem that **chaos, instability, uncertainty** is the name of the game. Tom Peters wrote a book in the late 80s called **Thriving on Chaos**. How to make chaos work for your company's success! Cool idea. The **real** question is—how to make **life** thrive in the middle of chaos?

-Know what the truth about me is? As if there weren't already enough instability in the world—I create my own chaos! I do dumb things. Say dumb things. Make poor choices. Pick fights with my family. Waste time and energy on stuff that produces **nothing!**

- B. For thousands of years, the people of our world have ceaselessly tried the same few things to reduce chaos and bring stability. Can you think of any? **Power** seems to always come to the top of the list. Think of Saddam Hussein, for example. The threat of torture or death **does** make people think twice about creating a problem. We generally think of power more in terms of **controlling** our circumstances and the people around us. Any of you know a controlling person? Are they sitting next to you?

1. Money is another thing people try. "If I can wrap enough money around my life—like insulation—it will keep unexpected things from sweeping me away! -And having good friends, helps, right? Invest in your friendships, build a solid relational world so that if things go bad, you can go **live** off of them? Not be left alone?
2. The question is—does this stuff work? I'd say in a **very** limited way in milder circumstances—and almost never when it comes to facing the really **tough** stuff life throws at you and the instability of a crazy world. Want my personal opinion? If you're looking to be master of your own destiny—and manage and create your own stability, you're going to get surprised; probably shocked. The **better way**, as crazy as it sounds, showed up in a manger 2000 years ago. I want to tell you why.

III. WHAT IF...?

- A. The scene is the hillsides outside a small town in Palestine called Bethlehem. From all outward appearances, it's a very a **very** peaceful scene. Not a sound, except for

the rustle of bushes in the evening breeze—and the occasion shuffling and bleating of sheep talking in their sleep. In the distance is the soft glow of oil lamps from the nearby town.

1. But the peaceful setting doesn't even **begin** to tell the whole story. What gave the appearance of stability was the iron fist of the Roman army. Get out of line, and you get nailed to a cross, thrown in prison, sold into slavery, or beheaded on the spot. It was called **pax Romana**. Roman Peace. Forced peace—enforced by power, and paid for by taxing the people they crushed. Boiling underneath this charade of peace was hatred—and chaos. And when it erupted? More blood.

-What money Caesar didn't take, Herod did—you know, to pay for his ad in the history books as the VIP of Palestine. The **culture** had been the same for centuries—but safety? Financial stability? In your dreams!

-That's the scene for this story. Even the main players in this story were thrown off balance. You know how we long to be home at Christmas? Mary, Joseph, the Magi and shepherds are all **far** from home! And the furthest from home was Jesus, God's Son. Pushed into a cold, bright, noisy shocking world where everyone was thrown off balance. Instability—in a **stable** environment!

2. God's messengers, angels, stepped right into the chaos and proclaimed a message of peace and stability. Let me read it for you:

That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people.

The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger." Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,

***"Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."* When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."**

(Luke 2:8-15 NLT)

-Sometimes we read through these words so quickly that we miss the power of what they are saying.

This is not a quaint little story that can be summarized with, **Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays**, or even **Have a Blessed Christmas!**

This is the intersection where Heaven and Earth collided—and things were **never** the same! God shows up—but not like Caesar or any other leader of a super-power would. He comes helpless, tiny, crying! Wrapped so tightly He can't even move.

-And **this** is precisely where all the hopes and fears of all the years meet—where prophecies made hundreds of years before start to get fulfilled. A teenage girl miraculously conceiving a child through the power of God—and a **very** unlikely looking King being born in Bethlehem.

-But, then, God always seems to work quietly. Behind the scenes. Gently, humbly, powerfully--God is bringing His Kingdom to this planet. And the only public announcement comes to the shepherds—on the lowest rung of the cultural ladder! It's an **amazing** message.

- a. This baby, born to Mary, a virgin, is a **Savior**. For them, that was a **huge** word. It meant the oppression was going to stop. Hunger, disease, the humiliation of being kicked around in their own country. A **Savior!** Ever thought about what **you** want saved from? Disease? Disaster? Global warming? Bad Christmas songs? The Britney Spears drama? Creditors? Addiction?

-But, surprisingly, God was going for something way different. **He will save His people from their sins.**

Most people in our world would think, "I kinda **like** my sins! Why doesn't God save the world from poverty and war and greed and waste?"

-Let me ask a question. When you have weeds, how much good does it do to mow them down with the lawnmower? If you have cancer, how much good does it do to just take stuff to stop the pain? God is saying, the **real** problem in the world is much deeper, much bigger. And the problem is sin. It's this bent in every person toward selfishness and pride and all kinds of destructive behavior. Doing what **we** want—not matter who it hurts.

-Want to know the truth about Ken Davis? I **need** to be saved from my **sin**. Not only does it hurt others, it hurts me. It damages my body, my mind, my soul, and the people around me. It creates **chaos** and **instability in my heart and soul**. I need to **change!** My problem is—I can't. Not on my own! It's not just the world that needs a Savior—it's me! Jesus is that Savior.

- b. Something else. He's the Christ—the **Messiah**. The One God has appointed to do everything He has promised for the people of this world. Over a hundred specific prophecies all narrowed down that night to a baby in a feeding trough—out in some stable. His coming was told about in unbelievable detail—down to when he'd come, where he'd be born, what he'd be like, what he'd do, and how he'd die. -The world then—the world now—has been looking for Someone to come with answers; someone—or something to show us the way, tell

us the truth—about ourselves, about the meaning of life, about what comes next. The angels said, “This Baby is the **One!**”

- c. But it’s all **way** bigger than that. The angels say, “He’s...**the LORD**. Again, we are accustomed to this language, this title. Somehow—**somehow**—the God who created everything was born into this world. He came vulnerable—with fragile skin, a heart, tiny fingers and toes—needing to be held, cuddled, nursed, changed. God...in a manger, out in some little barn or stable.
-God didn’t just send a special human, or key powerful angel #1. The Creator of all came **Himself**. He knows what it feels like to grow up in a chaotic world. To be hungry. Made fun of. And now **He’s** in charge of it all And He started a kingdom of hearts that keeps growing and growing and growing—and will **never** end!
- d. As if to reinforce this, it’s like **all** of Heaven cracks open, and these shepherds get a peace into this unbelievable party that they’re throwing. They’re **glad!**

“Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.” (Luke 2:14 NLT)

-If the angels sang in Hebrew to these shepherds, the word they used would be **shalom**. Shalom was a much bigger, broader, expansive word than “peace.”

It meant ongoing joy, celebration, wholeness, wellness, peace and brotherhood, kindness—it meant everything that the human heart longs for. Everything that we think of when we imagine a **STABLE** life.

-And because of Jesus, that tiny baby born that night, everything He taught, the fact that He would give his life for the likes of us—all of that peace and joy and hope and well-being and love is now offered to me. And to you. And we have to make a decision about what we will do with Jesus.

- B. I don’t know where you are in this story—or whether you’ve ever engaged with Jesus. My question is--**What if...?** What if this story isn’t just a great classic—to be replayed in a variety of ways in movies about Santa Clause, about greedy people learning to give, about people in Whoville learning that Christmas comes without all the trappings? What if...**what if...**the whole thing about God coming here, offering us Himself to us, forgiving and saving us from our sins—is true. More real than me standing up here?
1. You may be looking for some kind of outside cure to the instability and restlessness and change in your heart and in your world. What if, right in the middle of your mess, whatever it is, God could – and **longs** to give you peace and hope and joy and comfort? It doesn’t mean you’ll never be afraid

again. Were Mary and Joseph afraid in the middle of all this? Of course they were! Watch this clip – it's **so** tender!

- But under it all is solid rock! God **is** that rock. He holds **everything** together!
2. What if behind all the pointless things that seem to happen—there is a **point**? What if the reality behind the tiny slices of life we see is way more profound than we could ever imagine?
 3. What if this God—who effortlessly holds the Universe in His hands is not just blindly good and loving and perfect—but **knows precisely who you are**? What if this God became small, humble and approachable out of love for people like you and me? And **that's** what brought him to the womb of a teenage girl 2000 years ago?
 4. He could've just nuked the Romans and stopped all the wrong-doers in their tracks. He could **still** do that! But what if He wanted to love and save them too? So much so that He would gladly take everything that is wrong with life, wrong with the world, wrong with us—and die on a cross so that it could be made totally, completely amazingly right? What if, by His coming, He proved that love is more powerful than hate? That, ultimately—**LOVE WINS?**
-What if this baby, Jesus, the Son of God is now behind the whole panorama of history—**Lord of all!** Working through the lives of frail people who will love him, believe him and belong to Him?
 5. Know what I believe, with all my heart? That this story is truest and most real story in all history. That when you peel away all the Christmas stuff stacked around it—all the wrapping, all the sappy sentiment, all the stupid songs like, **Grandma Got Run Over By a Reindeer** and **Santa Baby**—that there's this **Baby!**
That all of history focuses down to a point of light centered on a feeding trough. And at the center of that light is...the One who created the trees it was made from and the mountains where they grew. He's the Savior. He's the **Lord of all!** And because He's alive—and in charge, we can have profound peace.
 6. The question you **might** be asking is—**how?** It's a personal thing for Jesus. When we invite Him, He himself comes and takes up residence through His Spirit. But, now, see, He's not a vulnerable little baby. He's Lord of all! His peace is **profoundly** real!

-He has given me peace for my past. I have a past, you know? Stuff I've done that I'm ashamed of—sometimes haunted by. But He paid for it—by dying on a cross. It's all forgiven—and I'm free.

-He's given me peace for my present circumstances. I've needed it in this past year with the death of both my parents. He's **never** let me down! I get scared. I get impatient. But I know...I **know** He's making sense of it all. And I have peace.

-I don't know for sure **what** my future holds—but I'm at peace! I know what's after death. He's walked with me now for over 40 years—and He will walk hand in hand with me—right through this life and into the next.

IV. **THE HOPES AND FEARS OF ALL THE YEARS...**

My message to you today is...this story is real. True. Powerful. Jesus, the Baby laid in that filthy manger so tenderly that night is real. He's Lord of all.

See, the deal is that the filthy manger He came to was **my** heart. Lots of germs. Lots of animals feeding there. I wouldn't lay **my** baby there. But Jesus came. And it's beautiful because, see, Jesus changes whatever He touches. With Him, he brought peace. Hope. Stability. Wisdom when for when I am totally out of answers. The author of the carol, **O Little Town of Bethlehem** was right:

The hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee...tonight.

He would come to that manger throne in your life right now—right into the chaos and instability of your life. But you have to invite Him to come. So, now—it's up to you.