

Interruptions at Christmas¹

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Text: Matthew 1:18-25

Purpose: We all face interruptions at Christmas. Some are life changing while others are minor inconveniences. We need to be willing to listen to these as teachable moments from the Master.

We all have tremendously high expectations of Christmas. We want everything to be perfect. We have pictures in our minds of children playing, church choirs singing, people smiling and getting along. But often it is not that way.

A middle-aged woman posted her Christmas wish list on the refrigerator for her husband to read. Rather than listing certain items of desire, she

simply requested “something that will make me look beautiful. “When Christmas rolled around, she expected to open a package with some expensive clothing inside. To her surprise, he gave her an exercise bike. Her expectations didn’t pan out in reality.²





Many of us feel that way about Christmas. It is supposed to be as the song says, “*It’s the most wonderful time of the year*” and the “*hap-hap-happiest season of all.*” But for many it will be a very difficult time because something has interrupted the joy of the season. It may be sickness, death, divorce, or loneliness. Maybe you are in the midst of experiencing unexpected interruption during this season of the year.



I read of one father who called a family conference at the beginning of the Christmas season and told each family member how he expected them to behave during Christmas. They were to be kind to each other. There were to spend more time with family. They were to be frugal in the amount of money spent on presents. And he ended his speech with the rally cry, “Let’s make this the best Christmas ever!” His little second-grade son responded, “But Dad, I don’t see how we could ever improve on the first Christmas.”³

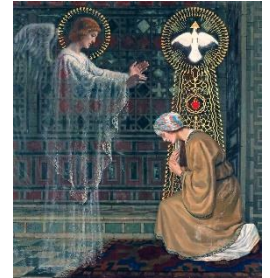


What a profound statement. We all look to the Christmas season to be a time of perfect peace, harmony, and joy – a time without turmoil. We want our tree to be right and our family to be nearby. But the first Christmas was not that way. It was an interruption.

Interruptions Can Happen at Any Good Time.

Interruptions come when they are not supposed to come, like at Christmas time. Someone has said, “Life is what happens to us while we are making other plans.”⁴

Consider the timing of Joseph and Mary’s interruption. Joseph and Mary were engaged to be married. Like Christmas, engagements are supposed to be a magical time. But it was during this time that a powerful interruption came along. An angel appeared to Mary (Luke 1) and told her that she would miraculously, as a virgin, conceive and give birth to the Son of God. What joyful news! Yet, what an interruption!



How would Mary explain her pregnancy to Joseph? Would he believe her? If he did believe her, would he be willing to take on that responsibility? What of her plans for the wedding? What about her dreams of romantic days and night alone with her husband? This interruption was not in her plans. And yet, she accepted it. She could have responded negatively, but she said, “*I am your handmaid, do as you will.*” (Mary’s Song – Luke 2)

We know how Joseph responded. He didn’t believe her. How could he? His plans for a happy home with the woman he loved were dashed before his eyes. His life, as well as hers, had been powerfully interrupted.

Interruptions come at the most inopportune times. I read a little humorous article entitled, “*You Know It’s Going to Be a Bad Day When...*”

- You see a *60 Minutes* news team in your office.
- You call Suicide Prevention and they put you on hold.
- You turn on the news and they're showing emergency routes out of your city.
- Your twin sister forgot your birthday.
- Your car horn goes off accidentally and remains stuck as you follow a group of Hell's Angels on the freeway.
- Your boss tells you not to bother taking off your coat.
- Your income tax check bounces.
- You put both contact lenses in the same eye.”⁵



In the book *“The Best Christmas Pageant Ever,”* we see the traditional Christmas play at the church being transformed into something unusual when the local rowdy, rambunctious, group of kids called the Herdmans come and take all of the key roles of the Christmas Play. These kids had never

heard the story of Christmas and here they were playing the role of Mary, Joseph, the Wise Men, and the Angel of the Lord. Their wild antics and their passion to protect the baby Jesus comes to a climax during the play. The Herdmans were an unexpected interruption in that church's Christmas play.

If we are not careful, our response to an interruption can send us down the wrong path.

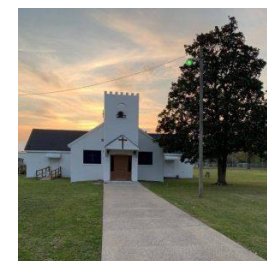
Joseph nearly went down the wrong path. When he discovered Mary's pregnancy, he was devastated. He



couldn't buy her story about the virgin conception. As much as he loved her and wanted to be with her, there was nothing to do but divorce her.

A betrothal (similar to our engagement today) was much more binding than today's engagements. The only way out of one was a divorce. Joseph had the right to have her stoned to death for infidelity. Yet because he was a good man, he did not want to harm her or even embarrass her. He would divorce her privately. This was Joseph's human response to a powerful interruption. But what a mistake it would have been.

Many, many years ago, we attended Glen Raven Baptist Church occasionally. At their annual Christmas play that year, Jo Anne played the role of Mary, I played the role of Joseph and Amber played the role of a child in the street. As long as I live, I will never forget the feeling that I had laying on that too short and too narrow bed as the Angel of the Lord appeared to me in a dream. I was to take Mary to be my wife. I got up from my sleep, and walked across the yard to where Mary was sitting knitting, reached out my hand and in doing so, I accepted her as she was. Of course, we traveled to see the innkeeper, and eventually were seated beside the manger. As we were there in the stable, the shepherds came, the wise men from the East came – all wanting to see to see the baby Jesus. I had a deeper understanding of Joseph that night as I saw the story of Christmas afresh and



anew through the eyes of Joseph. In the life of Joseph, this child was DEFINITELY an interruption.

Often an interruption brings on a knee jerk reaction. We make decisions that, if we were better informed, we would not make. For instance, Mrs. Monroe, a mother of eight



children came home one afternoon from the grocery store. Everything looked pretty much the same, though it was a little bit quieter than usual.

She looked into the middle of the living room and five of her darlings were sitting around in a circle, exceedingly quiet, playing with something in the middle of a circle. So, she put down the sacks of groceries walked closer and saw that they were playing with five cute little skunks. She was instantly terrified and yelled, “Run, children, run!” Each child grabbed a skunk and ran in five different directions. She was beside herself and screamed more frantically. It so scared the children that each squeezed his skunk! And as you know, skunks don’t like to be squeezed!⁶

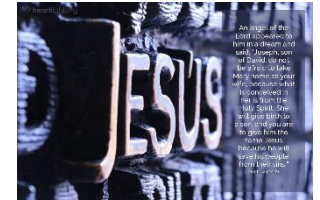
We must be careful that when we face an interruption, we don’t just react according to our own fears and feelings. We might make a serious mistake.

The key to handling an interruption is to get God’s take on it.

Thankfully, God rescued Joseph from his potential error. I can image Joseph, having learned of Mary’s situation, tossing and turning in bed, trying to decide what to do.

Finally, he decides. He will divorce her privately. Having decided, he finds enough peace to get to sleep.

But while he is sleeping an angel of the Lord appears to him in a dream and says, “*Joseph, don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife. What she says is true. The child in her womb 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. This is in fulfillment of what God said through Isaiah the prophet, “The virgin shall conceive and give birth to a son, and He shall be called Immanuel meaning ‘God with Us.’”* Joseph woke up with a changed mind. He would not divorce Mary. He would take her as his wife and help raise this miraculous child. He had gotten God’s perspective of his interruptions.



When you encounter an interruption, whatever it may be, don’t react according to your own feelings and thoughts. Seek God’s direction.

Remember Proverbs 3:5-6, “*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.*”



Here are three words to remember when you encounter an interruption. The first word is **prayer**. The first thing to do when your life is interrupted is stop and pray. Pray for guidance. Pray for courage. Pray for help. But Pray!

A PRAYER FOR PERSPECTIVE

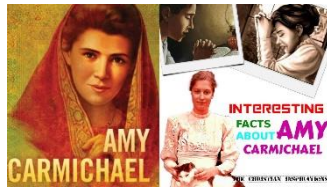
The second word is **perspective**. Put the interruption in the proper perspective. How bad is it really? Whatever your interruption, put it in perspective. How long will this actually be important? What difference will it make in eternity?

DIVINE PROVIDENCE

God's Governance of All Things

The third word is **providence**. Keep in mind that God in His providence, is still in control of your life. Nothing can happen to you without the leave and notice of your Father in heaven. He still has all of the hairs on your head numbered.

Amy Carmichael was a missionary to South India. She spent 56 years on the mission field without returning home on furlough. Midway through her career her life was interrupted by an accident that damaged her leg and left her bedridden for the last 20 years of her life. Her understanding of Romans 8:28 sustained her and made her productive during that time. (*“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”*)



She once wrote, “A wise master never wastes his servant’s time.” Amy Carmichael knew that God was not wasting her time as she lay in bed. He could use her there. From that bed she wrote forty books that have inspired and given courage to Christians for years. God is not wasting your time when He allows an interruption to come into your life.

He has something to teach you or something to accomplish through you. Trust in His providence.⁷

Interruptions can at times redirect our lives in a new and positive way.

This was true of Joseph and Mary. Their plans were interrupted, but oh what an interruption. Can you imagine a more wonderful privilege, or a more challenging responsibility, than to be the human parents of the Son of God? The direction their future took was not what they had planned, but it was so much better.



Have you ever considered that God could do that kind of thing in your life? Not that you would be made the parents of the Son of God – since that has already been taken – but that God would take what seems to be an interruption, an unforeseen problem, and use it to set your life on a new and better path.

This kind of thing happens all the time. A recent study indicates that 87 percent of people surveyed said a painful event (such as the death of a loved one or an illness) caused them to find a more positive meaning in life.⁸



Templeton Prize

In 1993 Charles Colson received the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion. The \$1 million prize is the largest prize for achievement in any field. It is kept higher than the Nobel prizes in such fields as science and literature in the belief that religion is

more important. Colson served seven months in prison for obstructing justice in the Watergate cover-up and was known as the scandal's "hatchet man." His conversion to Jesus Christ later led to the founding of Prison Fellowship in 1976. In response to this award, Colson said, "Out of tragedy and adversity came great blessings. I shudder to think of what I would have been if I had not gone to prison. What some would have perceived as the interruption of a brilliant political career, turned his life in a new and positive direction."⁹

Whatever interruption you may be enduring right now, why not look at in a different light, and ask, **"God, are you using this to do something great in my life?"** Then begin to look for the marvelous thing He will do.

I want to close with the following story. Amid the horrors of World War 1, there occurred a unique truce, when for a few hours, enemies behaved like brothers.



THE WWI CHRISTMAS DAY TRUCE
Famous Christmases in History #6

Christmas Eve in 1914 was all quiet on France's Western Front, from the English Channel to the Swiss Alps. Trenches came within 50 miles of Paris. The war was only five months old, and approximately 800,000 men had been wounded or killed. Every soldier wondered whether or not Christmas Day would bring another round of fighting and killing. But something happened: British soldiers raised "Merry Christmas" signs above the trenches, and soon carols were heard from German and British trenches alike.

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Christmas morning dawned with unarmed soldiers leaving their trenches, though officers of both sides tried unsuccessfully to stop their troops from meeting the enemy in the middle of no-man's land for songs and conversation. Exchanging small gifts, they passed Christmas Day peacefully along miles of the front. At one spot, the British played soccer with the Germans, who won 3-2.



In some places, the spontaneous truce continued the next day as neither side was willing to fire the first shot. Finally, the war resumed when fresh troops arrived, and the high command of both armies ordered that further "informal understandings" with the enemy would be punishable as treason.¹⁰

Amazing! In the midst of war, these soldiers interrupted the normal routine and remembered Christ. They took time on Christmas to give thanks to God for the gift of His son.



Whatever interruption you may be experiencing this Christmas, there is one thing you can do – stop and give thanks to God for Jesus. And as you praise and thank God, even in the midst of unexpected interruptions and difficult circumstances, may the peace that Jesus came to bring ... be yours this Christmas.



LET US PRAY

Notes:

¹ Sermon thoughts from the book, *The Book of Joshua*, by Jeff Griffis, Pastor of Beechwood Baptist Church, Gardendale, Alabama.

² Raymond McHenry, *Something to Think About* – p. 290

³ McHenry

⁴ Frank Harrington's sermon "The Power of Interruption"

⁵ James S Hewett, Illustrations Unlimited

⁶ Bible Illustrations, Parson Tech.

⁷ McHenry

⁸ Source unknown

⁹ McHenry

¹⁰ A Treasury of Bible Illustrations #174, Christmas Spells Peace