

Hey, everybody! Merry Christmas and welcome to Valley Creek. We are so glad that you are here with us today. Whether this is your first time with us, maybe you haven't been in a while, maybe you've left and recently come back, or maybe you're here every single week, it really doesn't matter. We are so glad that you are here with us. You see, we've been praying for you and preparing for you that you would have an encounter with God. So welcome to Christmas at Valley Creek. You see, it's Christmas. It's supposed to be a time of awe and wonder and peace and joy and faith and hope and yet, if we're honest, Christmas is often just tradition, rhythm, routine, expected plans and parties and gatherings and family and activity and all the things that we seem to do year after year.

It's like every year we're a year older, and yet when Christmas time comes around, it's like our life often feels exactly the same. We do the same things, go to the same places, kind of go our own way, have our own life, and that's much what the first Christmas was like. You see, if you look at the story of Christmas, every character in the Christmas story that first Christmas, they were just kind of doing their own thing and going their own way. Think of the angels. They were just worshipping God like they had done every day before it since they were created. Think of Mary, this young girl who was dreaming about her wedding, dreaming about her marriage, dreaming and planning and getting ready for this amazing future that she saw in front of her. Think of Joseph, he was working on the vision for his family and who they were going to be and where they were going to go, where they were going to live, what they were going to do, how he was going to provide for them and protect them.

Think of the shepherds, they were out in the field, working hard. It wasn't the most lucrative job, but they were doing their best to make it happen. Think of the wise men. They were just doing what wise men do. They're probably reading and writing and teaching. Think of the innkeeper, he was hustling and working hard to make his VRBO work fully, full occupancy, five-star review, waiting list for his Airbnb and then Jesus came, and He interrupted everything. I mean, think of the interruption for the angels when the Father comes to them and says, "It's time, go prepare the way," and they responded by being messengers and preparing the way for Jesus.

Think of Mary when the angel shows up and says, "Greetings you who are highly favored, do not be afraid for the Lord is with you and the Holy Spirit will come upon you and you will conceive a child. He will be the Son of the Most High and this is impossible with man, but with God, all things are possible," and she responded by saying, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said." Think of Joseph. Think of how his life was interrupted when he heard that his fiancée was pregnant and then the angel came and said, "Don't be afraid, Joseph. What is in Mary is conceived from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you will call Him Jesus. For He will save His people from their sins," and Joseph responded by laying down his life to protect Mary and Jesus.

Think of the shepherds. They were interrupted by the angels showing up saying, "Glory to God and the highest. Peace on earth to men on whom His favor rests, do not be afraid for I bring you good news of great joy," and they responded by saying, "Let's go to Bethlehem to see this thing that the Lord has told us about," and told everyone about what they had seen and heard. Think of the wise men. Their lives were interrupted when they saw the star in the sky. They traveled a great distance to come and bring treasures to Jesus and worship Him. Think of the innkeeper. When that interruption happened, when Mary and Joseph knocked on the door and asked if there was any room for Jesus, and he responded by saying, "I don't want any interruptions, and there is no room for Jesus," and in many ways, that's the story of Christmas. It's when Jesus came to interrupt our lives. The only question is, how will we respond?

You see, Scripture tells us that at just the right time, in the fullness of time – in other words, when we least expected it and least deserved it – Jesus came. Born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law that we might become sons. In other words, Jesus came to interrupt the law. He came to interrupt religion. He came to interrupt darkness. He came to interrupt time itself. He came to interrupt life and He moved into our neighborhood with grace and truth. He took on humanity and showed us what it was like to be fully human and fully alive. He was Emmanuel, God with us. He came to show us the way, the truth, and the life that all who believe, all who receive can become children of God. He came to bring us hope. He came to bring us life. He came to bring us joy. He came to bring us peace.

Christmas is the story of an interruption. The problem is that we're not usually ready for that interruption and it most often comes in a way that we're not expecting. You see, that first Christmas, the Jewish people had waited hundreds of years for the Messiah to come. Hundreds of years for a Savior to come. Hundreds of years for someone to come and rescue them and when you have hope for so long, sometimes it's hard to see hope when it shows up because it often comes in a package we're not expecting. You see, that first Christmas, they were expecting a conquering king, but Jesus came as a suffering servant. They were expecting a victorious man, but Jesus came as a helpless baby. They were expecting Jesus to come in the great city of Jerusalem, but He came in this little town of Bethlehem.

They were expecting Him to come in the full light of the day so everyone could see, but He came under the cover of night. They were expecting Jesus to come rich and famous, but He came in poverty and hiddenness, and even though He didn't come the way they expected or the way they wanted, He came exactly the way they needed and that's what Jesus does in our lives. He didn't come the way we expect or the way we want, but He comes exactly the way that we need – divine interruptions are divine invitations. You see, the Scripture tells us that in Jesus was life and that life was the light of men. His life was our light and when He came that first Christmas and interrupted the world with His life, that life brought light so we could see. This is why Christmas is full of lights. This is why we do all of the Christmas lights and the candles and all the things. Why? Because it was when Jesus came with His life to bring light, so we could see, because without Jesus we were lost in darkness.

Living in the valley of the shadow of death, lost in the land of darkness and when you're lost and it's dark, you can't see. You don't know where you are. You don't know where to go. You don't know if you should go this way or that way or move to the left or to the right. You don't know what is good, what is real, what is right. You don't know what is true and yet when light comes, you can see, and you start to figure out what is good and what is real and what is true, and when Jesus came He didn't come with such a light that it blinded us and caused us to turn away. It was this warm, gentle light that moved closer and closer and got brighter and brighter, so we could finally see the way, the truth, and the life.

You see, the interesting thing about interruptions is you can't control them. You can't plan for them. You can't. Prepare for them. They're unexpected and if we're honest, when we're interrupted in our life, we're frustrated. We're irritated. It's disorienting. It kind of catches us off guard. We're not sure what to do about it and it changes our attention, and what interruptions do is they remind us we're not in control. We're not in control of the present, let alone the future and you can't control interruptions, but you can decide how you respond to them and interruptions are simply divine invitations.

You see, for the last few moments, hardly any of you have heard anything that I've been saying. Why? Because you just got interrupted by a candle. For the past few moments, your life just got interrupted by a candle. All of the sudden, this light started coming behind you and this candle got to you and interrupted you when you weren't expecting it, and you kind of fumbled and had to find your candle and decide how you're going to respond and what to do, and you're kind of stirring and not sure and you're taking the light and maybe then passing it on to the person sitting next to you, and all while that's happening, you're being interrupted, you're distracted, your attention is changed and for a lot of you that was just a super stressful experience. Some of you are sitting here and you are thinking like, "What's happening? Like, this is not how the candle thing goes, like they're doing it wrong, someone is in trouble!" Why? Because we think the candle light should start very organized, very controlled, very methodical, starting with one candle in the front and then we all see it and it comes when I'm perfectly ready for it, but that's not the story of Christmas.

The story of Christmas is that Jesus came from behind you in a way that you weren't expecting and interrupted you in the midst of your life, and you got a choice. Were you going to respond to it or cause it to pass by you? You see, I believe this Christmas, Jesus wants to interrupt your life. He wants to interrupt your tradition and your routine, your plans and your activities. He wants to interrupt the way you do your life. He wants to interrupt your brokenness and your pain. He wants to interrupt your sin and your shame. He wants to interrupt that bitterness and that anxiety, the depression, the worry, the stress, the fear. He wants to interrupt your skepticism and that offense. He wants to interrupt your loneliness and your mind and your heart and your soul and your life. He wants to interrupt you with His goodness and His grace,

and it comes in a way that we don't expect. Maybe that interruption has come from that person who invited you to come to service today.

Maybe the interruption is the emotion that you've been feeling. You can't even control it since you've been in this service. There's like this emotion and you don't even know what it is. Maybe the interruption is that still small voice you're hearing in your heart. Maybe the interruption is God telling you He's with you in that hardship of your situation or your circumstance. Maybe the interruption is just God's been speaking to your soul that there is more. I don't know, but I know He wants to interrupt you because that's the story of Christmas. For God so loved the world that He sent his one and only Son – Jesus came to interrupt the world – that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.

Jesus didn't come to interrupt your life so you can do something for Him. He came to interrupt your life so He can show you He has already done everything for you. I bring you good news of great joy that today Jesus has come to you. Don't be afraid. His life is your light and He says, "Come and follow Me, and let My life be your light to show you the way." This Christmas, Jesus has come to interrupt you with His love and so for the next few moments, before we begin to sing, can we just take a moment and sit silently with our candles and just listen and ask the Lord how He wants to interrupt our lives. Jesus came to interrupt you with goodness. The only question is, how will you respond?