

Magnificent Intervention

Week of December 6

In Dr. Seuss' story "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" the question is raised: Is it possible to steal Christmas? The Grinch tried to; and many of us as children wondered why anyone would want to do such a thing and if he would succeed. The Grinch planned his own evil "intervention" – tired of all the presents and noise, all the hassle and merry-making toys, he planned and schemed until he thought he had everything figured out. But he didn't succeed. He learned there is a greater force at work in Who-Ville.

It's scary how many of us want to do that very thing, to keep Christ from coming – coming into our world, our struggle, our situation. We may not openly admit it, but we *live* it when we don't want to deal with the hassle, the dysfunction, or the ordeal. We would rather take matters into our own hands. But though we think we have it all figured out, we are not in control. The Grinch in us wants to bypass the problem by controlling the situation and other people. But like the character in Dr. Seuss' story, it's a matter of the heart. We too need a Magnificent Intervention.

Read Matthew 1:18-23

No one can keep Christmas from coming – not even Joseph. When Joseph found out Mary was already pregnant he immediately began to take matters into his own hands and planned out an "intervention." But then God shows up!

1. What was Joseph planning to do prior to the visit from the Angel (v19)?

Think for a moment the possible repercussions had Joseph's plan to "break the engagement quietly" been successful. Re-read *aloud* vv 20-21. In the space below, write down what you learn about Joseph and Mary, about the Holy Spirit, and about God's plan for this Child. Express your personal gratitude to the LORD for His Magnificent Intervention.

The Lord sent his angel to intervene at a critical point. Notice the Angel addressed Joseph as "son of David." We don't often think about this fact, but had Israel still been a sovereign nation, Joseph was in line to be king! He was a direct descendant of King David (see Matthew 11-18, Luke 3:23-38). Upon hearing the Angel's words, Joseph would trust God and take Mary to be his wife. He would later travel from Galilee to Bethlehem to register for the Roman census "because he was of the house and lineage of David (Luke 2:4). Israel was, however, under Roman rule when Jesus was born (6 B.C. until the fall of Rome) and Joseph was not a king, but a carpenter from Nazareth. God's rule is not dependent on the position and titles of man.

2. Joseph must have been facing some fear, because the Angel told him, "Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife." Why is fear such a paralyzing force?

Think of a time you were paralyzed by some fear. How did the Lord come through for you with a Magnificent Intervention?

Israel is no stranger to fears of paralyzing force – the Hebrews fleeing bondage, taking the Promised Land, David facing Goliath, corrupt leadership, the kingdom divided, exile, reclaiming their identity after 70 years in exile. God's people have faced multiple fears and setbacks throughout history, much brought on because they forsok God and took matters into their own hands. But God is merciful.

God is all about rescue and intervention when His people turn to Him. And yet, when God's people are determined to follow Him, the forces of opposition are always close by. Like a lion's roar, the enemy uses fear to paralyze his prey (see 1 Peter 5:8), but the Lion of the tribe of Judah, as Christ Jesus is referred, is stronger and mightier (Revelation 5:5). In the following question are four examples of God intervening on behalf of His people.

3. Read the following Scriptures and think about the fears Israel has faced (Judah, the Jewish people) from surrounding opposition. Though rebellious, the LORD is merciful towards His people. Look for the LORD's magnificent intervention (His sovereignty) over their setbacks?

Deuteronomy 31:1-8

Isaiah 7:1-16

Esther 4:13-17

Haggai 2:1-9

The truth is, the LORD has intervened magnificently for His people from the beginning. The nation of Israel itself is a miracle. It was through God's promise to Abram that salvation would be offered to the world, and though the plight of Israel has been one of ongoing world tension, God is not finished with His people but fulfilling His promise to this day. From the time when Jacob's descendants were but a seed in Abram's loins (Genesis 15:5), to a time in the future when "the kingdoms of this world will become the Kingdom of our LORD and of His Christ" (Revelation 11:15), God is in control of the affairs of this world.

4. Joseph didn't understand at first – but not only could he not keep Christ from coming, he was to be an integral part of the event. What plight are you dreading or avoiding? What is the Lord teaching you about difficulties we face through this message/lesson?

Just as the Lord sent His Angel to Joseph at a critical point, the Lord wants to intervene for you if you will turn to Him. He has the armies of Heaven at His express command! Take time to pray about your situation, the difficulty you are facing. Ask the Lord to help you stop worrying and start trusting Him.

One Year Bible Reading

December 6: Hosea 4:1-5:15, 2 John 1:1-13, Psalm 125:1-5, Proverbs 29:9-11
December 7: Hosea 6:1-9:17, 3 John 1:1-14, Psalm 126:1-6, Proverbs 29:12-14
December 8: Hosea 10:1-14:9, Jude 1:1-25, Psalm 127:1-5, Proverbs 29:15-17
December 9: Joel 1:1-3:21, Revelation 1:1-20, Psalm 128:1-6, Proverbs 29:18
December 10: Amos 1:1-3:15, Revelation 2:1-17, Psalm 129:1-8, Prov. 29:19-20
December 11: Amos 4:1-6:14, Revelation 2:18-3:6, Psalm 130:1-8, Prov. 29:21-22
December 12: Amos 7:1-9:15, Revelation 3:7-22, Psalm 131:1-3, Proverbs 29:23

Magnificent Intervention

Text: Matthew 1:18-23

The Plain Truth:

Our greatest _____ is often an opportunity for a Magnificent Intervention.

1. Joseph didn't want the _____ and feared the _____.
2. Joseph didn't realize that his _____ was God's Magnificent _____.
3. Joseph's _____ was God's Magnificent Intervention in _____.