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Matthew 1:18-21

“Mary, Did You Know?”

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Can you imagine Joseph waking up from that dream? He goes to sleep the night before, anxious and angry. He’s supposed to marry Mary, but she’s suddenly expecting a child. And Joseph’s 100% sure it’s not his child. He knows that Mary’s been unfaithful.

But that night an angel appears to Joseph in a dream. The angel lays it all out for him: “That baby Mary is carrying? God made that happen. Mary’s baby boy is going to be the Savior of the world!”

Joseph wakes up, and what do you think he does? My guess is that he runs off and finds Mary. “Hey, Mary,” he says, with a big bemused smile on his face, “Did you know that your baby is God’s Son? An angel told me this baby is going to save our people from their sins! Mary, did you know?”

Mary smiles, shakes her head, and answers, “Joseph, I did know! An angel told me the same thing. It’s unbelievable, but it’s true! God is doing a mysterious, wonderful thing here, isn’t he?”

And then, I imagine Mary asking, “So, Joseph, what’s it going to be? Are you in or out? Are we still getting hitched or what?”

Then, some months later, in tiny Bethlehem town, in a lowly stable, the Christ Child was born. Joseph and Mary knew who he was. But, apart from a few smelly shepherds and some wandering Wise Men, nobody else knew. To everybody else in the whole world, the birth of Jesus was nothing. Just a trivial, unimportant event.

And yet, God was doing a huge thing, an incredibly important thing, by sending Jesus. The infant sleeping in the manger was our true God, our Creator, our omnipotent Ruler. Jesus was a flesh-and-blood baby, but he was God's Son, at the same time. And this God-man's mission was exactly what the angel had told Joseph in that dream: "He will save his people from their sins."

Baby Jesus, surrounded by sheep and goats and cows in that stable, would grow up to become the Lamb of God. He would be the sacrifice. Jesus would give up his perfect, holy life to pay for our sins, to accomplish our forgiveness. Christ came to save you and me. So, yes, God was doing a huge thing, an incredibly important thing, on that first Christmas.

Mary knew. Joseph knew. What about you?

A few weeks ago, Pastor Lew made sure our confirmation students at Hope know. He taught them a lesson about the true identity of Jesus Christ: Christ's dual nature, his humanity and his divinity. And, just to see if they got the point, he had the confirmation students make up some pretend bumper stickers. As if Mary and Joseph were bragging about their son on their cars. Here's a few examples of what they came up with.

- "Our son walks on water. What about yours?"
- "Our son is perfect ... deal with it."
- "Our son is holy moly, and blocks sinners like a goalie."
- "Our son was unplanned ... thank God!"

I think our confirmation students get it. How about you? I hope you're not too stuffed with Christmas cookies, or too focused on opening presents, to get this important message tonight. The Christmas story teaches us a powerful, galvanizing truth. Here it is: in little events, God is doing

huge things! In seemingly-insignificant events, like a baby lying in a manger, God is doing incredibly-important things!

And not just on that first Christmas. God still uses little events every day to accomplish huge things. That's what God does. That's how God rolls. And you and I, God's people, need to understand this and celebrate this. Most of all, you and I need to trust this and live by it.

Start with Christmas. Do you know that the baby boy, Jesus, is the Lord of all creation, and your Lord, too? Do you believe, on this Christmas Eve, that the Christ Child is God's perfect answer for your sin? Do you trust that, by sending Jesus to be born for you, God has saved you for all eternity? In little events, God is doing huge things!

And then think about your family. Or, if you don't have a family, think about your circle of friends. Do they all know about Jesus? Do your kids and grandkids, your friends and neighbors, all know Jesus as their Savior, as their forgiving, loving Lord? And do you know what an impact you can have on the people you love? You don't have to make some gigantic sacrifice, or give up all your worldly possessions. But live out your faith, believing that God can use the little things we do, in mysterious and wonderful ways, to make huge, important things happen.

For example, let me just talk to the parents here for a minute. I know you've got a lot going on with your kids every day. But do you know how important the little things you do can be? Your children need a relationship with God. They need to know who Jesus is, and to know his forgiveness. So pray for your kids. Pray for them every day. Bring them to church. Make it a weekly thing in your family. Find little ways to put God first in your family. Show your kids that God is more important than social events, in sporting events. And in

those little everyday decisions, in those simple little family priorities, God will be shaping your children for eternity in huge, important ways.

And then I ask you all to think about what goes on here at our church. We see people at Hope, young and old, volunteering, serving, helping out, carrying out the ministries of the congregation, doing good deeds out in the community. Take a good look at the back of the bulletin. These are just a few examples of the many ways the people of Hope are sharing Christ's love. We have 21 different community-focused ministries in our church.

But guess what? None of our little Lutheran ministries and good deeds can save a single soul. But that's not why we do them. We act as the hands and feet of Jesus, in little and seemingly-insignificant ways, because we know, we trust, we believe that God does huge, incredibly-important things in the lives of others. Every ounce of credit and glory in this church goes to God, because he's the one who uses little events to do huge things.

Tonight we celebrate what God did on the first Christmas. And on this Christmas Eve, let's all look eagerly to what God is going to do in the little events of our lives. Amen.