

OPEN BEFORE CHRISTMAS
"OPEN YOUR EYES"

Take a look around you.
Ok, I want you all to shut your eyes.
I have a surprise for you.
Shut your eyes! Close them tight!

OK, are you ready?
Open your eyes! Surprise!!!

Just kidding.
Well, actually just practicing.
Do you see anything that you didn't see before?

Today in our Advent series, "OPEN BEFORE CHRISTMAS"
We want to open our eyes, our spiritual eyes.
Open our eyes to see the new things and new truths God has for us.
Open our eyes to see the old things and old truths
that we have somehow missed or have forgotten about,
Or to open our eyes means we see something
that God has in store for us, that we are to do in the future.

Now seeing these new things and these new truths means
we will probably have to leave behind some old things or old thinking
and make some changes.

Babies and waiting for babies have a way to make people to open their eyes
and help if not force them to make changes their lives.

Since my daughter Jessi and her husband Erik are expecting a baby,
I thought I would ask them how expecting a baby has "opened their eyes?"

Jessi has always wanted to be a mother and since getting pregnant
and being pregnant she has been bursting and bubbling with excitement.
Well most of the time anyway.

At first she enjoyed those little,
"hi mommy, I'm here" movements in the womb.
They brought on big smiles of wonder and sweet sighs of delight,
but she is also aware of something else,
she has opened her eyes, so to speak,
she has begin to understand there is more to have a baby than she thought.

She writes to her daughter,
 Dearest Baby Girl, these games are not much fun anymore.
 I know you enjoy using my rib cage as a jungle gym
 but sticking your little hands and feet in between my ribs is now off limits.

Know that I thank God for you with all my heart,
 Know that I thank God for your spunky demeanor
 and know, that I thank God for my bladder too.
 So, for God's sake, actually for my bladder's sake,
 please, please, please stop doing gymnastic on my bladder.

And one more thing, dearest baby girl, those cute little hiccups you get,
 lets limit those to between 9am and 9pm, ok.
 Thank you for your co-operation.
 Love, Mommy

Jess has seen annnnd felt ,
 being a mommy can be a bit more painful and difficult than she thought.
 Certainly worth it, but more painful and difficult than she thought.
 Most of you could have told her that anyway.

Actually so far Jess has said the biggest "eye openers"
 for her and Erik are what we all discover sooner or later in life;
 that they need to keep their eyes open because they are in uncharted waters,
 they can't control all of their circumstances,
 and they see they're going to need help.

I asked Char how this experience has "opened her eyes."
 She just smiles.

As for me, expecting a baby has not only "opened my eyes,"
 but has opened my wallet as well...opened it wide.

Forget about a stock market slump taking a big hunk of our retirement,
 My granddaughter has already taken a bigger chunk,
 And she hasn't even been born yet.

Anything the Grandma Char can think of that her little granddaughter needs;
 food or formula, a crib or clothes, a giraffe diaper bag or bottles,
 she is on line and those things are on Erik and Jessi's doorstep in three days.

By the way, if you're interested in helping out,
 We're grateful but Jess has all she needs.

But open your worship folder to the purple page and you'll see "Baby Shower for Jesus."
You see God can use you, inviting you to meet the needs of others.

It will be more than worth your time, money, and effort.
I had the privilege this week of delivering some diapers
to the Salvation Army and to Birthright.

It opened my eyes not only to the needs of others,
but to the poverty of my spirit as well.
It was such a humbling experience.
Those people were so grateful.
I took them ten packages of diapers and they acted like it was \$10 million.

Anyway in this Advent season
we need to further open our ears to hear what God wants us to hear,
Pastor Eldon talked about that last week.
We need to open our eyes to see what God wants us to see,
and we need to open our hands, to do what God wants us to do.

Let's try to see what Joseph and Mary saw before that first Christmas.

Joseph must have been elated being engaged to Mary.
He would have envisioned providing and protecting Mary and his future children.

That is until he "saw" that she was pregnant before the fact.
That would really have "opened a guy's eyes" wouldn't it?
I mean if you discovered your fiancé was pregnant
and you didn't have anything to do with it...

Most of us would easily see where we'd been wronged and feel hurt.
We'd be filled with anger and anguish, shame and pain.

But Joseph is truly amazing.
He handles this differently,
he sees this different than most of us would.

He puts aside his hurt and sorts through his options;
1- could marry Mary quickly even though she must not care for him, the baby wasn't his,
2--have the marriage contract set aside quietly and let Mary go off someplace to have the baby,
3-or he could insist on his rights, publicly divorce her, and have her stoned to death

Matt 1.19 tells us that, "Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man
and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly."

He's not worried about saving face for himself,
he wants to save face for Mary.

God enters-an angel appears

and Joseph is given the direction and guidance he needs,
“Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife because
 what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.
 She will give birth to a son, and you will give him the name of Jesus,
 because he will save his people from their sins.” Matthew 1.20b-21

Joseph now saw that he had another option.

He saw his life had new meaning, had a new mission,
 Had a new purpose and that new purpose fit into the plan,
 fit into the puzzle of God's plan.

He would provide and protect Mary,
 care for her and care for the baby Jesus.

I think God wants you and I to take a look at our lives and ask;
 What in our pain, what in our shame has and can be redeemed?
 Can be made useful? Can have purpose? Can have worth?

Have you had to deal with a messy divorce, a difficult death, or a child of disgrace?
 Are you struggling with the ongoing consequences of an illness or injury,
 or the nagging temptation of an addiction or the guilt of past sins that still plague you?

Open your eyes, turn to and trust God, see what He sees.

And Mary, what did Mary see when she opened her eyes?
 Well, we know the drop in visit of the angel Gabriel
 opened her eyes, opened them a bit wider than usual.

At first whatever she saw, she was afraid, shaken even,
 It's really uncharted territory.

Why would God even come to her or even to her village?
 Nazareth was located four miles from the Roman garrison at Sepphoris.
 We know that when the Roman soldier got a few days leave
 many of them headed for the red light district of Nazareth
 where they could find plenty of cheap wine and woman.

Why God chose Nazareth and chose Mary-God only knows.
 We know God is and has been full of plenty of surprises.

And God had a big, big surprise for Mary-she is going to be pregnant.
 And I would bet when Mary heard that her eyes got bigger and bigger,
 and wider and wider, now not filled with fear, but now filled with fascination,
 fascination upon hearing the news that she would be pregnant,
 and pregnant with God's child, no less.

She likes this idea, accepts this assignment, and signs on the sandy line,
 "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said." Luke 1:38

Like Joseph she sees the hand of God moving on her behalf.
 She sees that God is going to use her...she's tickled pink.
 She sees herself with a mission, her life has new meaning,
 a new purpose and that purpose fits into God's plan.

Mary sees herself in a new light and she sings, Luke 2:46-48
 "My soul glorifies the Lord, (I am bursting with God-news)
 And my spirit rejoices (is dancing) in God my Savior
 For he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.
 (God took one look at me, and look what happened.
 I am the most fortunate woman on earth)
 From now on all generations will call me blessed..."
 (What God has done for me will never be forgotten)

Again, we can ask a few questions,
 Where in the here and now have you seen God doing great things for you?
 Where have you fit into God's plan?
 Where has God needed to lift you up?

The Bible shows us over and over again
 that God does work in the lives of people,
 common or complex lives, ordinary or not so ordinary lives,
 simple or maybe not so simple lives.

And if God has worked in those lives.
 he is also at work and will continue to work in our lives.

Do you believe that?
 Well, if you believe that,
 and if you want to see God at work in your lives,
 then you need only, open your eyes.

Let's pray

