

**THE MESSAGE for Dec 19, 2010****Advent 3****Matthew 1:18-25*****Incarnation*****The Rev. Dr. R. K. Miller**

I have four stories to share with you this morning.

Story #1... Years ago there was an old Swedish church in Chicago. The membership had dwindled and the building had fallen into disrepair. The congregation received news that the King of Sweden was coming to visit the United States within a year. There was some significant connection between Sweden and this church years ago. Since the King of Sweden was going to be in Chicago, he wanted to worship at that old Swedish Lutheran Church.

At first, the members were shocked and then thrilled with this incredible news. They looked around and realized they had some serious work to do to get ready for the coming king. So, for the next 10 months, the people of that church poured every dollar and every ounce of energy into getting ready. They refinished the pews, painted the walls, laid new carpet, repaired broken stained glass, tuned the pipe organ, sandblasted the outside stone, and redid all the landscaping.

All of this renewed energy and sense of purpose got the neighborhood involved. As the members got fired-up, they began to invite all sorts of people to help with the preparations. Many of these new people became members. That once dead and dying church began to feel very much alive again.

The Sunday before the king's arrival, the church was beautiful just like it was when it first started. When the pastor began worship that Sunday morning, he looked out a packed house. He paused for a moment and wondered out loud – how the news about a coming king can bring such life and renewed energy to a church.

Story #2... A guy, named Matthew, wanted everybody to know the incredible news that the King had arrived. He wanted everybody to know that the God of the universe – the one who created all things had come into world. He wanted everybody to know that the transcendent One had become the incarnate One. Immanuel – God with us and is here to dwell.

I love how human Matthew's story is. A young man and a young woman are engaged. They love each other. They look forward to spending a life together. But then the unthinkable happens. She's pregnant but they have not yet consummated their love. Joseph feels betrayed. His heart is broken. And yet, Joseph is a man of remarkable integrity. He puts aside his anger. Instead of publicly exposing Mary, Joseph decides to break their engagement privately and quietly. That's when God intervenes and lets both of them in on a secret. This is no ordinary pregnancy. This will be no ordinary child. This is God up to something new.

Listen to how Matthew tells it... (*Read Matthew 1:18-25*)

Story #3... On August 5<sup>th</sup> this year a copper and gold mine collapsed in Chile, trapping 33 miners 2,050 feet below the earth's surface. For 17 days they had no contact with anyone outside of their dark, damp, and dirty world. They survived on two spoonfuls of tuna, half a cookie, and half a glass of milk every 48 hours. Every day that passed made it less likely for a successful rescue. Advisors to the president of Chile told him to give up hope and stop wasting valuable resources to rescue these men. But the president was persistent. He would not give up until they were found – dead, or alive. These miners were relentlessly pursued from above.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> day of this ordeal, a bore hole from on top reached the trapped miners, bringing hope and joy to their world below and hope and joy to their anxious families above. Through that tiny bore hole a connection was made. Supplies and messages were sent to keep the miners alive and hopeful. On October 13<sup>th</sup>, sixty-nine days after the mine collapsed, the whole world was riveted to this story as the last of those 33 miners was brought to the surface. And the world rejoiced.

Story #4... The greatest rescue operation of all times has been going on for the last 2000 years. God chose to drill down from heaven to reach into our darkness, to bring light and life into the dreariness of this world. God is relentlessly pursuing us from above through Jesus. We are part of God's unfolding miracle story of rescue because the King of kings has come, and will come again to finish what he started. That's the mystery of our faith.

Christmas is about the awesome news that;  
One: The King of kings is coming again so... be ready.  
Two: The King of kings connects us with God above so... be hopeful.  
Three: The King of kings is in the process of rescuing us right now – pursuing us with an unconditional, incomprehensible love so... be joyful.

Now that's an awesome story worth telling to every one. Be ready, be hopeful, be joyful. Amen.

Let us pray, Thank you Jesus, for coming to rescue us. And may the world rejoice. Amen.