

Jesus is the Answer  
Luke 2: 8-14  
December 23, 2007

The Angels said, "This will be a sign to you."

When you drive from Waupaca to New London on Hwy 54 you see a sign that says "Jesus is the Answer. What is your question?" My son used to like to make up questions. What is the square root of 364? Jesus Why did the Packers trade away Darren Sharper? Jesus He knew that Jesus was not the answer to all questions.

Have you seen the billboards out on Hwy 41 that change every few minutes? They can put new messages daily on those billboards. You can see who Larry McCarren will have on his next Locker Room show. Up to date.

There's another sign on Hwy 44 just this side of Oshkosh. It says "Jesus died for your sins". The paint is faded and the sign is bent over and falling down. You can't even see the message on one side because the trees have grown up in front of it. For some, Jesus is not an answer that fits. It is like an old road sign that somebody used to care about, but they don't care about anymore. And for some people, their Sunday School Jesus doesn't fit their grown up needs.

My son knew that Jesus was not the answer to all questions.

Children have important questions about how to learn what the teacher says and who's going to pick them up after soccer practice. Youth wonder about how to impress the opposite sex. Young adults need answers to where there is job. Young parents wonder how to make money and still raise a family. Older adults question how to get enough work to keep the employees busy. Retirees and seniors need to know how to keep healthy. Important questions. But here we are, before the mystery of Christmas, and something is happening that provides an answer for even deeper questions.

Jesus is not like the dying sign on Hwy 44. Jesus is the answer to some questions. The sign is still correct. Jesus is the answer to the crucial questions.

Where is God?

Can I know God?

Can I be forgiven and clean of heart?

Will I go to heaven?

At Christmas we put ourselves into a stinky, maybe cold stable. The stench of urine, dung and sheep on a hard dirt floor. Hay is scarce. The only people who go to this kind of place are shepherds. They've had a message from God through an angel and have come to see what is going on. A teenage woman holds a newborn baby. The baby is wrapped in cloths to keep out the cold and dirt. The excitement of the birth is settling down to fatigue and sleep. The mother and baby and father are trying to get some in that smelly, cold, hungry place. Where is God? Right there in that stable.

God is in a fetus, then a baby, then a child, like the ones at your place. God had to learn to walk. Had to learn how to play with other kids. God felt weakness and was tired, felt failure and was tempted. God is with the family that is going without Christmas presents. God is in with the people who are still trying to find a place to live after Hurricane Katrina.

Where is God? God is organizing people to fight cancer and Aids and famine and war. Those little newborn hands grew up to touch the wounds of lepers and were pierced by those who feared they'd lose their power. Where is God? Anywhere that people are overcoming poverty and other evils in the world.

Can I know that God?

Those who wonder will say "God, show me a sign, and I'll believe." Sometimes God uses miraculous signs to get a message across. But not whenever somebody asks. Since God is a person, not a thing, God can't be manipulated like that. If you said to your friend, if you do this for me, then we'll be friends, what will they do. Probably nothing. They don't want to be manipulated. They won't be forced. They want to be asked. They want a conversation. That's how healthy relationships work. So if you want to know God, you pray. You say, "Here's what's going on with me". You say "what's going on with you." "Give me a chance to do something with you." And then the opportunities come. You start to notice when someone needs a kind word. You notice when a charity needs your help. And you start to get opportunities to do something good toward solving your problems. And you find out who God is more and more by taking Him up on those opportunities.

"Draw near to him and he will draw near to you" the Bible verse says. Jesus is not a thing but a person. Not to be figured out but to be in relationship. Like friends, like lovers, like co-workers are in relationship.

Jesus is the answer.

Where is God? Can I know God? Can I be forgiven and have a clean heart?

We are all made with appetites. We need sleep and food and sex and shelter, etc. We are curious for knowledge and want to feel good about ourselves. Nothing wrong with appetites. What matters is how we meet those needs. It is all too easy to break commandments or lie or have an affair or become selfish or addicted and enjoy our angers and hurts. But then we notice that these things are getting in the way of knowing God and enjoying life. Sick ways of feeding appetites has made us sick at heart. Say you had two tall glasses of water, one clear and one dirty. You drop a coin in each glass. Which one is easier to see the coin? The one with clear water. When God reaches down to touch you in a special way, its going to be harder to notice it if your life is dark and cloudy, morally speaking. It's not that God is not in your life, you just can't see him as well. So what do you do to get that dirt out of there?

It's not what you can do, it's what Jesus has already done. The wise men brought Jesus a gift of myrrh. That's a spice for the dead. Jesus died, even though he didn't deserve to die. And God used that sacrifice to get the dirt out of your life, to forgive your sins. Jesus has paid the price for your crime. It's not something you can do, it's something Jesus did. The way to a clean heart, where you can see God's action and feel his love, the way to a clean heart is Jesus.

The sign on Hwy 44 may be old and falling down but the message is still fresh "Jesus died for your sins." Jesus is the answer.

Another deep question:

Can I live with God forever? Can I go to heaven? I said that a clean heart comes by Jesus' action, not yours. You still have to decide whether to accept that or reject it.

Your decision is necessary. God will not manipulate you. God will not force salvation on you. That's not how healthy people relate. Jesus is not a thing, not a rule, not an idea. Jesus is a person. So if the deep desire of your heart is to know God and be clean inside, you must accept his forgiveness and stay in touch. Then you'll notice him more and more as your heart gets cleaner. You'll notice opportunities to love yourself and others more and more as you stay in touch. You'll understand his plan for the world more and more as you ask him to show you. Scriptures and songs and sermons and the wisdom of other Christians will be more and more helpful as you stay in touch. This world will seem more and more Godly and heavenly as you go along, and then, after you die, all the barriers to God's perfect will are gone and you'll enjoy God's love perfectly in heaven.

Jesus is the answer to the question "Can I live with God in heaven?"

The angels said to the shepherds "this will be a sign to you". One of the signs to us says "Jesus is the Answer". When we get those deep questions of our hearts answered with Jesus, then it is easier to find answers to the other important questions: how to play fair, what job to look for, how to pay the bills, how to enjoy being a senior citizen.

Where is God? God is with us.

Can I know God? Keep up the conversation. You can know God.

You can be clean of heart. You can be going to heaven.

Jesus is the answer.