



Bethany Lutheran Church & Preschool  
5051 McCarty Road  
Saginaw, MI 48603  
www.bethanysaginaw.com  
Phone: 989-793-9579

## Viewpoints

*Observing events in our modern world from the viewpoint of our ascended Savior.*

### Christmas Has Its Blemishes ~ January 6, 2016

*How do you react when your picture-perfect moments are ruined?*

[Online Version & Archive](#)

We who know well the Christmas story might picture it as a romantic painting. Or, as a nice snapshot. Or as something quaint—oddly attractive and charming. Even though Mary and Joseph lodged in a stable, since they were people accustomed to livestock, we assume the smells and noise were no big deal. Likewise, when Mary gave birth to Jesus outdoors in a cattle shed, we assume that since she lived a rural and rudimentary lifestyle, this too was no big deal. So we may tend to paint over some details and picture the scene as sweetly quaint.

The same can even happen with a former military warrior, like Jim (not his real name). Jim grew up distrusting the church because he considered God to be indifferent at best, and mean-hearted at worst. The last thing on his mind was attending a worship service or Bible study. But the persistence of his loving wife won him over to visit church, then to visit with the pastor, and then to learn what the Bible teaches. That's how Jim discovered the truth:

- That God has every reason to turn away from us because of our sins, and to let us continue to stubbornly drag ourselves into hell.
- But God's love is so great, he sent his one and only Son into the world to course his way from the feed-box-cradle to the old-rugged-cross. He did this to reconcile us into his eternal family.

Wow! The impact of Jim's new faith manifested itself in a variety of ways, including the plans he and his wife made for celebrating their anniversary. Jim, the former military warrior wanted to make it especially quaint by asking the pastor to share's God's word in a ceremony with gathered family and friends.

But then Jim was hospitalized. Anyone who entered his room—whether doctors, nurses, his wife or his pastor—had to be gowned, gloved and masked. This situation blew up the plans Jim had for his special celebration. Would he now revert to his old view of God?

But someone saw this coming, because he's always way out ahead of things. So God's Spirit included in scripture the events that happened at the backend of the Christmas story, when the Wise Men came to worship the Christ child. See if you can pick up on what I mean by God "being way out ahead of things."

Then [the Magi] opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." So he got

up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son." (Matthew 2:11-15, selected)

If our impression is that the Christmas account is so sweetly and wonderfully quaint...

- Ooh... how picturesque that shepherds gather at the manger to praise God's Son...
- Aah... how magical that kingly wise men worship by presenting him with gifts...

well, my friends, quaint it ain't. Not when King Herod is seeking to kill baby Jesus. Not when Joseph has to suddenly hustle Mary and the child out the door in the dead of the night for foreign Egypt. The result is that what we assume should be a picture-perfect and treasured time is blemished, blotched and broken.

On one hand, as wicked King Herod exploded with murderous designs, God used his evil eruption to remind Mary and Joseph that Jesus was not born into our world to construct paradise on earth. Jesus came to rescue us for paradise in his heavenly home.

And on the other hand, God demonstrates how he's way out ahead of things. First, God sent the angel messenger to nullify Herod's plans. Second, God provided through the Magi's gifts the financial means for Joseph to flee with his family into Egypt. In fact, God is so far out ahead, he even told his prophet to prophesy it centuries before it happened. Yes, God is way out ahead, like a potter who bends and finesses the clay with artistic touch and vision, long before it becomes the finished product.

By design, Christmas has its blemishes to equip us for life on earth. Quaint it ain't, but conformed and customized. A truth that helped new-to-the-faith Jim deal with the distress that he would spend his anniversary in the hospital. Yet Jim still observed his special celebration, even though it had to happen in a hospital room with only one guest, the pastor. The word of God was read. Prayers were spoken. And when the ceremony concluded, Jim insisted that I sit beside him on one side, with his wife on the other, so a nurse could snap our photo. What a scene: Three people sitting on a hospital bed in bright yellow gowns, blue gloves, blue masks and smiling eyes. Picture perfect! Yes, picture perfect because of the truths unwrapped by the Christmas story. Quaint it ain't, but conformed and customized.

*This Viewpoints is adapted from the message delivered to the students and faculty at Michigan Lutheran Seminary at the 1-6-16 chapel service. Learn more about MLS at [www.mlsem.org](http://www.mlsem.org)*



*To become a recipient of Viewpoints, please email [mike.nitz@bethanysaginaw.com](mailto:mike.nitz@bethanysaginaw.com) with the phrase "VP please" in the subject line. Or if you wish to no longer receive Viewpoints, type the phrase "discontinue VP" in the subject line. Thanks.*

*Blessings to you and your loved ones, Pastor Mike*

