

What If? Pt. 2

Pastor James Foley – Shared Sunday, December 5, 2021

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Before we dismiss the children and workers for Children's Church and Nursery, allow me to note that...

FYI 1 – Today is a special day for our assembly, as we are set to welcome several new members. We hold membership to both a privilege and responsibility! It is something to be entered into soberly, prayerfully and with great joy! Note the following items concerning church membership...

Firstly, we believe church membership to be biblical in nature. It was the norm for Christians in the Early Church to identify with a local branch of the Church Universal, wherein they functioned as committed and connected parts of a local assembly. We do well to comply with scriptural precedent.

Secondly, we believe church membership promotes spiritual health. Show me a person connected with and committed to a local church, and I will likely show you a person making strides in their walk with the Lord. However, show me a person who attends nominally or not at all, and the inverse is likely true.

Thirdly, we believe church membership promotes kingdom advancement. The only way we are going to reach this world for Christ and make disciples in kind is together. As we collectively operate under a common vision, embrace shared biblical principles, utilize our resources, time, gifts and talents, we change the world!

FYI 2 – This morning it is my joy present to you several candidates who have recently completed our membership process. As I call your name, please come to the front to the front of this assembly to receive prayer...

- 1) John Dixon
- 2) Belle Dixon
- 3) Ryan Barry

FYI 3 – I would welcome the members of the Board to come and lay hands on these individuals (**PRAYER**).

POST – As each of you who stand before me today have satisfactorily completed the requirements for membership as outlined in Scripture and in our governing Bylaws—and upon the full recommendation and approval of the Board of Deacons and the Board—it is my privilege to welcome you into the membership of this assembly. May this be the beginning of a long and wonderful partnership in the work of Christ!

KEY – Church, make them feel at home as they are seated!

A DEPARTED MEMBER

NOTE 1 – Speaking of members of this assembly, I regret to inform you of the passing of former church member, Karl Sandstrom. For those who may not be aware, Karl and his wife (Pat) attended this church early in my tenure as Pastor. They were good friends of mine prior to coming to New Life, and they were very good friends to this church before moving to Texas app ten years ago.

NOTE 2 – I could share story after story re. Karl, his classic one-liners and dry wit, his generosity, etc. He was deeply loved, and he will be deeply missed. Karl, born March 28, 1947, went home to be with the Lord on November 30, 2021. May God bless his grieving family! Keep them in your prayers and know that a card has been sent on behalf of the assembly offering our condolences.

NOTE 3 – Karl was one of the first people to contact me at the passing of my father. They were fast friends! I like to think that my dad was part of his greeting committee in heaven—a committee that led him to Jesus. Heaven is becoming more-and-more full of people I cannot wait to see again. Until our homegoing day, let us serve Jesus ourselves and revel in the promise of life eternal.

ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING

Finally, the Annual Business Meeting is on the nearing horizon! Thus said, note the following...

NOTE – The 2021 Annual Business Meeting will take place on Sunday, January 23, 2022, following the Sunday Service (January 30 in case of inclement weather). Nomination forms necessary to nominate individuals for the elected office of Deacon on our church Board—whose terms expire at the Annual Meeting—will be distributed today after service. The completed forms must be placed in the designated box located on the table in the front foyer by no later than Sunday, December 19, 2021. Also, the deadline for the submission of Ministry Leader Reports is Sunday, January 2, 2022.

Children and workers are dismissed at this time for Children's Church and the Nursery. God bless you!

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INTRODUCTION

Thank you for joining us today! Whether you are here in person or watching via the livestream, you are most welcome. Please have a Bible at the ready and be prepared to take some notes. We have much to cover in a relatively short amount of time.

SETTING THE STAGE

NOTE 1 – Last week I introduced a two-part sermon series entitled “What If?” In our opening installment we examined select scenes from the wilderness journeys of the Hebrew people as they trekked from the land of bondage to the Land of Promise in the days of Moses. As was noted, this is a frustrating period to review, as the Israelites unceasingly rebel against the Lord in a spirit of murmur, complaint and faithlessness. Thus said...

NOTE 2 – For each account we rewrote the text in a more positive light, imagining what could and should have been! Then we considered what transpired according to the biblical record (i.e., noting human evil and the accompanying judgment of God). Ultimately, from such accounts we learn what NOT to do. Please feel free review this previous installment online at www.NewLifeBarre.org and/or download the notes at your leisure...

KEY – Moving along, this message will function in the exact opposite or inverse manner...

NOTE 3 – Today I want to consider select scenes from the Gospel record that connect to the Christmas story. For each, we will rewrite the texts in order to reimagine what could have been (i.e., from a more negative perspective). Then we will examine what actually—and blessedly—took place! From such scenes we will learn what TO do, as we consider genuinely great and aspirational figures. Let us delve in...

#1 – MARY

Let us begin with a selection that should be quite familiar to those who treasure the Christmas story...

Luke 1:26–33 (NIV)

26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. 28 The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”

29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. 30 But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. 31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”

LET US PAUSE...

FYI 1 – It is at this pt. that things could have taken a darker turn. The text might have continued as follows...

Luke 1 (*PJUV)

“This cannot be,” Mary cried to the angel. “I am a virgin, betrothed to my beloved Joseph. I cannot and will not allow such a happening in my life or ours!” With this rejection, the angel Gabriel went away from the town of Nazareth, awaiting further instruction from God concerning His message.

Q. What if Mary had uttered these words?

A. Christians—past, present and future—would certainly esteem her quite differently. Rather than hailing her as “blessed,” she would forever be cast in a more villainous light. Would we write or sing songs about her? Would we name daughters after her? Of course, we must be careful in condemning her for such a response. From an earthly point of view, her rejection would have been both sensible and understandable...

Q. Who would believe she was w/ child as a virgin?

Q. How could Joseph ever receive her after such a scandal?

Q. Would she lose her standing in the community (i.e., ostracism)?

Q. Would she face some penalty and/or harm for conceiving out of wedlock?

Q. How could she say “goodbye” to her dreams of marriage and family?

Q. Who would be willing to say “YES” to such a call—even if that call came from God?

FYI 2 – Yet against all odds, this is not how the story goes. Rather, Scripture records the following (blessedly)...

Luke 1:26–38 (NIV)

26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. 28 The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”

29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. 30 But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. 31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”

34 “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”

35 The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. 36 Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. 37 For no word from God will ever fail.”

38 “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her.

Q. What do we see in Mary?

A. We see **a)** faith; **b)** humility; **c)** obedience; **d)** stewardship; and **e)** Mary as a vessel of God’s favor...

KEY – Let us strive after such a glorious example as we follow the call of God on our lives!

#2 – JOSEPH

Let us continue with another figure forever associated with the Christmas story...

FYI – Let us read the full account from the NIV before offer any reimagining(s)...

Matthew 1:18–25 (NIV)

18 This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. 19 Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. 25 But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

NOTE 1 – There are moments in this story that could have taken a VERY different turn! For instance...

1) A Poor Reaction (v. 19)

Matthew 1 (*PJUV)

Though Joseph was known to be a man of the law, bitter resentment grew in his heart against Mary and her perceived treachery. Rather than put her away quietly, Joseph dismissed her publicly. The town of Nazareth, incensed at her sinfulness and claims of supernatural conception, hurled stones at Mary until she died.

2) Just a Dream (v. 20–24)

Matthew 1 (*PJUV)

20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”). . . . Yet when Joseph woke up, he dismissed this oracle as just a dream, and chose to divorce Mary despite the word of the Lord.

NOTE 2 – These reactions would have been understandable! Yet I love that such happenings never took place. Rather, we have the glorious record and godly example of Joseph! What kind of example? An example of **a)** restraint and compassion; **b)** faith; **c)** obedience; **d)** humility; and **e)** dutiful stewardship unto the Lord.

KEY – Let us strive after such a glorious example as we follow the leading of the Lord in our lives!

#3 – SIMEON

Let us continue with another figure indirectly connected with the Christmas story...

FYI – Let us read the full account from Scripture before offer any reimagining(s)...

Luke 2:22–35 (NIV)

22 When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”), 24 and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons.”

25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. 27 Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, 28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

29 “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.
30 For my eyes have seen your salvation,
31 which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:
32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel.”

33 The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, 35 so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

NOTE 1 – There are moments in this story that could have taken a very different turn! For instance...

***A Missed Visitation (v. 25–27)**

Luke 2 (*PJUV)

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would be given the opportunity to see the Messiah prior to his death. However, despite the moving of the Spirit, Simeon failed to go to the temple courts on the day of Jesus’ dedication, for...

- 1) ...He was overwhelmed with emotion amidst personal crisis...
- 2) ...He was too busy in the toil of his work to make the time...

NOTE 2 – Yet I love that such happenings never took place! Rather, we have the amazing record and example of Simeon! What kind of example? An example of **a)** righteousness and devotion; **b)** spiritual communion and leading; **c)** perseverance; **d)** prophetic insight; and **e)** enduring hopefulness (i.e., consolation of Israel, etc.).

KEY – May we strive after such a glorious example in the course of our lives and living!

#4 – ANNA

Similarly, let us conclude with another figure featured amidst the Christmas story...

FYI – Let us read the account from Scripture before offer any reimagining(s)...

Luke 2:36–38 (NIV)

36 There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. 38 Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

NOTE 1 – There are moments in this story that could have taken a very different turn! For instance...

Q. What if Anna turned from the Lord following the death of her husband?

Q. What if Anna had allowed bitterness against God and others for her circumstance?

Q. What if Anna had turned to an illicit lifestyle to meet her needs v. turning to the Lord in faith?

NOTE 2 – Such reactions would have been understandable for Anna. However, I love that we see in this woman an example of great godliness! Specifically, an example of **a)** contentment in God; **b)** faith; **c)** devotion unto the Lord; **d)** spiritual leading and prophetic unction; **e)** thanksgiving; and **f)** hopefulness unto the future (i.e., redemption of Israel).

KEY – Her story may be quite short, but we see in her so many virtues that we are to wholeheartedly embrace!

APPLICATIONS

NOTE 1 – When we think of figures like Mary, Joseph, Simeon, and Anna, each of their stories could have been so different (i.e., and understandably so). Who could have blamed them for acting in purely human and/or sensible ways? Yet each found a way to transcend their limitations and inclinations in the Lord, serving as everlasting examples of the most Christian virtues...

NOTE 2 – **a)** Faith; **b)** Obedience; **c)** Humility; **d)** Righteousness and Devotion; **e)** Stewardship; **f)** Spiritual Communion and Leading; **g)** Perseverance; **h)** Prophetic Insight and Utilization; **i)** Thankfulness; **j)** hopefulness; and more. In their own way, each became **k)** objects and conduits of the favor of the Lord!

KEY – What will be said of you? Will you follow the missteps of the ancient Israelites of last week (i.e., forever grumbling, whining, entitled, joyless, hopeless, faithless, miserable, and self-condemned) or do you prefer better company? I can tell you what God would have you choose, but YOU alone must make such a choice...

...CHOOSE WELL.

CONCLUSION

NOTE 1 – Those who wish to give online may do so at www.NewLifeBarre.org. Those who wish to give in person can utilize the offering boxes located throughout the church facility. Thank you for your faithfulness in supporting this local work of Christ.

NOTE 2 – Ministry schedule...

Prayer – Sunday at 8:45am

Sunday School – Sunday at 9:15am

CYC – Tuesday from 3–4pm and 4–5pm

Weekly Study – Thursday at 6:30–7:30pm

Women’s Ministry – 2nd Tuesday at 6:30pm

Men’s Breakfast – 2nd Saturday at 9am

Potluck – Following this Service

Numbers 6:24–26

24 The Lord bless you

and keep you;

25 the Lord make his face shine on you

and be gracious to you;

26 the Lord turn his face toward you

and give you peace.