

Dec 24, 2018, Anthon UMC, Luke 2:1-20, "Many Will Be Offended"
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Do you get offended easily? Maybe it just me, but I feel offended that so many people get so offended at things that really should have no power to offend, if you compare them with the things that really are offensive....things like; People not teaching their children to be loving and kind and moral and humble so they have a chance to grow up not to be offended by every little thing that doesn't go their way in adulthood going overboard being offended by them.

I find it offensive at that public-school teacher in Elkhorn, Nebraska recently thinking she was being inclusive and culturally sensitive to all students, banning any Christmas decorations including Elf on a shelf and those candy canes in school because they historically represent Christ, such as the J for Jesus, etc. If you look you hard enough at anything of any culture you can find something about which to be offended, but how hard should someone nitpick at candy? If you like, you can even be insulted by M and Ms, especially the red and green ones, because the M could stand for Mary and mercy and Merry Christmas or if you turn them sideways and make an E, they could stand for Easter or upside down the W could stand for water and you know that's what we get baptized in!

And what about Christmas music? The world should probably be getting offended by the offensive words of some of the rapper music demeaning women, but rather they are getting bent out of shape, judging as offensive the old Christmas songs such as, "Baby, It's Cold Outside," a song that has been crooned for 75 years now is judged as a song to lure a young woman into a man's house for what they assume are immoral actions. Good grief! All this time I thought the song was just flirting, but what do I know?

And on and on, until to my surprise, "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer" is now accused of being an offensive racist song as poor Rudolph is ridiculed for being different. Did they not get to the part where Rudolph's differentness is redeemed as a special gift and he saves the day with his bright shiny nose? Don't get me wrong, there are plenty of good and necessary points of offense out there we should stand up against, but let's save our concerns about those things worth getting offended about.

For instance, let's take this Mary and Joseph story as recorded in Luke, chapter 2. It was filled with things that could truly be considered worth getting offended about. Whether we like it or not, Jesus' coming was offensive to many in many ways. His mother was not married when she became pregnant with him. Mary and Joseph were forced to take an inconvenient journey back to their family home of Bethlehem, due to

taxes...taxes...always offensive! His birth came about in a place filled with smelly animals. Now most of us would find placing our newborn in a manger, clean straw or not, offensive, but not God. God got right down and dirty with us, providing shelter, but not convenience, for the little family. God then invited lowly shepherds, not so fresh from the fields, to come right on in to view his Son born into a situation to which they could relate. God in Jesus went from high to low and low to high as the angels sang praise that filled the heavens with a holy lullaby. Wealthy kings followed a star over miles and miles of desert and mountains to come to present gifts to this child. They, Gentiles who were used to the best, left it all to make this journey to visit a Jewish baby they believed to be some sort of a king. Could have been offensive but was remarkable. King Herold who was totally offended by Jesus birth tried to have him killed but failed.

In Jesus' entire lifetime he lived humbly and he spoke such beautiful truths that the common people were drawn to, as these words told them God included them as his own. For Jesus to include everyone as worthy was offensive to those who were considered the elite of the religious community. Jesus was offensive to many in that he lifted up the sinner and the broken ones and invited them to come to him for healing and

forgiveness, never counting his own cost of rebelling against the oppressive Jewish authorities.

While we want to see this Jesus as sweet and holy and accepting, let us also remember he spoke words that were offensive to many. He said things such as; following God meant also you have to love your enemies, Offensive! that you have to forgive those who sinned against you, Offensive! that the gate to heaven was narrow and few were going to go through it, Offensive! that you have to repent of your sins and follow him, offensive! that you have to surrender your life to God, Offensive!

When you speak God's truths you may offend others and they will seek to take you down. Because Jesus was offensive, those who were threatened by his truth conspired against him to give him the most offensive death possible...a common criminal's death on a cross. That'll teach him to offend. But Jesus, son of God, was willing to be offended from birth to death for our sake. And while many were offended by God coming in our flesh to tell us we are sinners in need of redemption, Jesus, who was tested and tempted in all ways as are we, remained unoffended to take our punishment. He did it gladly in order to save us from an eternal death. Jesus did not hesitate to make a way for us to enter heaven taking our

place on the offensive cross and shedding his blood for our sins. And that my brothers and my sisters, was the epitome of offensive!

If anyone had a right to be offended at that time it was Jesus. If anyone has a right to be offended at what the world is claiming to be offended at in our own time, it is Jesus. But still he came for us the first time and he will come again and many will be offended at his coming and many will weep that that they were so offended at his coming the first time.

But for we who are not offended by the cradle and the cross, we are invited come to remember and celebrate in the sharing of the bread and the cup this night as we recall Christ's birth and death and resurrection into our midst. We are invited to come humbly and thankfully on this night of nights to receive Him.