

The Rock: 11-29-2020

Advent 2020

Bringing in the Kingdom

First reading: Isaiah 7:10-15 (Stephanie and Greg Fortier)

Title: Joseph (Savior / King)

Scripture: Matthew 1:18-25

Theme:

What do you do when your world is turned upside down? How do you work through challenges and changes, and at the same time keep the faith? Character, relationship with God, trust...

Introduction:

As we begin the season of Advent, of waiting, I think it is good to acknowledge that this has been a unique year.

A year of one-off decisions, of difficult decisions, challenges and changes. Some of us, in the middle of having to deal with this once every hundred years pandemic have had to navigate saying goodbye to loved ones.

Some of us have welcomed new babies and then gone on the roller coaster ride of prayer and concern as health challenges have tested our faith and strengthened our community.

We have walked through a pastoral change right at the outset of a lock-down, having to adjust how we say goodbye and then hello to a pastor.

So many things have happened in the year which, at times has felt like a very long decade. Yet I am encouraged, even when at times I am discouraged. I know many of you are too.

Besides finding comfort and strength in my family and friends, my community, I find great peace and comfort in the Bible.

Not because, as some would think, it is a way to escape reality and the things that we are dealing with. Actually, it's just the opposite.

Real people, at real times in history, dealing with real challenges, and doing so very successfully sometimes, and well, not so successfully at other times.

This year we are going to journey through the Christmas story as Matthew records it in his gospel.

Looking at Joseph, the husband of Mary. The Wise men from the east, the horrific events which happened as a result of Herod's desire to keep his throne, and to the exile and return of this young family from Egypt to Nazareth

The Story:

There is always the settled peace of knowing God has things under control. Most especially when it looks so much at times to us as though He doesn't.

We can trust that His hand is in all the challenges of life. That can be seen so clearly in Joseph's story today, but first a quick look at "the list".

No, I'm not going to go through all these names which Matthew gives to us. I simply want us to know that it is there for a reason, and it's not to take bets on how many names the pastor gets them right or wrong in the reading of them.

Matthew lists all these people in such a way as to make a point, well a couple points actually. First, that Jesus is the rightful King through Joseph's line.

His Jewish readers would need to see and understand that if Jesus was ever going to be considered as Messiah.

Second, and as important to me anyway, is some of the names he puts in this list. Names, such as Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and finally Bathsheba.

One tricks her father-in-law into sleeping with her, another was a prostitute before becoming part of God's people, the third is a Moabitess -a long time enemy of the people of Israel.

The last, well Matthew can't even write her name, if that's really what's happening here. Or perhaps, just perhaps, Uriah needs to be remembered, and David, King David's deeds need to as well.

Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, had an affair with King David, and David in turn killed Uriah to cover up the sin.

Yet, Matthew purposefully places their names in this genealogy or "genesis account" of Jesus of Nazareth. Why? Grace, that's why.

You see, as much as Matthew wants his readers to understand that Jesus is the true King, he wants them, and us to know that we are part of God's family by and through grace.

Not through anything we have done right. Yet, we discover that Joseph, "the husband of Mary", a strange twist in this list, as Matthew makes sure we understand

that Joseph is here, not because through him Jesus was born, but rather through Mary, he would become the father of the son of God.

Two ordinary people going about a simple and ordinary life are challenged to give up that life in order to serve God in a very unique and challenging way.

Let's not ever forget that these very young people gave up their reputations and a peaceful quiet life in order to be obedient to God.

Matthew starts off with what I call the cliff note version of the story when he tells us:

"Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit."

-Matthew 1:18 ESV

There's a lot more to that than meets the eye, and to get the back story we have to go to Luke's telling of what happened to Mary.

There is so much more here than just, Mary was pregnant with God's child.

"In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God."

-Luke 1:26-35 ESV

I go here very intentionally, because it is here that we see Mary's heart. Soon enough we will see Joseph's, but for now,

the servant attitude of this young lady who knows her God and knows her Bible.

For this event didn't happen in a vacuum. This is not a fairy-tale written to cover up an illicit affair. No, remember, this was happening to real people, at a real time in history, at places that even today we could visit.

Because she knows her Bible, and she trusts God, the angel gives her a sign, a confirmation that this isn't some bad pizza dream, but is in fact true. God is once again on the move.

"And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her."

-Luke 1:36-38 ESV

You see, in all of the uncertainty of our lives, God is the one constant, the one certainty. He always has our best interest in mind. When he calls us to things in life, as He has done here with Mary, He will always give us that assurance.

One of the best ways to find and have peace in the crazy is to read, to learn, and to memorize your Bible. Will it give you a direct answer on how to deal with the pandemic lock-down or the crisis you are in.

Perhaps not, however, it will always have the answer you need to strengthen you, reassure you and remind you that God is sovereign and keeps watch over you.

Before we run out of time this morning, let's venture back to Joseph and his decision. I went to Luke, because there were some gaps that we needed filled.

You see, here comes the human factor of this story, that because we are so far removed, we tend to forget. At some point Mary had to talk to Joseph about what happened in the conversation with the angel.

It's clear to me that Luke spoke to Mary, for how else would he have gotten the intimate details, were it not from her?

Can you imagine, by the time we are here in Matthew, the dinner conversation had taken place, because Joseph is struggling, as any man would.

"Honey, how's the lamb tonight? Do you want a little more wine, or vegetables? Some bread? Oh yeah, I was visited by an

angel today and he told me I am pregnant by God's Holy Spirit."

Silence, or perhaps not, but definitely awkward. Please remember that these are two real people dealing with a very real problem.

Being betrothed to someone, finding out that they are pregnant as you perhaps sit at table, sets you back a step or ten.

How would you feel, guys? How would you respond to such a thing? We think we are struggling right now with restrictions and "lockdowns", imagine how Joseph felt when this world changing news came to him.

But you know, the more I study this Christmas story, the more I realize that Mary knew something about the man she was engaged to. She knew what God knew, and that was what kind of man Joseph was.

"And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly."

-Matthew 1:19 ESV

Often overlooked is this "husband of Mary", and his response here is huge! His character shines through. You see, he too knew his Bible and he knew the Law.

He knew just what to do, but he didn't, not right away.

Many of us men, in a fit of anger, would have fired off a bunch of stuff and made an emotional decision that perhaps we would have come to regret. Let's be honest with ourselves.

Not Joseph, he didn't let his emotions get the better of him, even though, I am sure his stomach was in knots and his mind swimming with all kinds of thoughts. His character shines here.

He doesn't act on his emotion, and we see that in the beginning of verse 20:

"But as he considered these things..."

-Matthew 1:20a ESV

The word used here by Matthew; I think is important. Literally translated it means: "to process information by thinking about it carefully".

In other words, to ruminate over it, to ponder it. Something his Mary was so very good at, pondering things. Why did he do this? Because he knew his Mary, and this was not something she would do.

Having an affair is nothing that would ever cross her mind. So, Joseph pondered what to do. Can we? Do we guy's, respond

this way in crisis moments at home? I leave that with you, as I think on it myself.

Joseph was a just man. God knew Joseph, as he made him for this very moment. Much like his namesake in Genesis, he would do the right thing even though the price was high.

Why? Because this was Joseph's character, formed as it were like Mary's, through his relationship with God and knowing his Bible. Joseph understood the heart of the Law as well as the letter.

This isn't an angry vengeance, as he sorted out what to do, and at the same time, doing all he can to not bring more shame upon her.

What a deep abiding love he had for her. A godly love which would exercise justice and mercy, even as he is hurting and confused.

That is until the angel shows up and reassures him:

"...behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."

-Matthew 1:20b ESV

Listen, your wife isn't lying to you. What she told you is not only true, it's exactly what God ordained all along. Yup, it's weird, but not unheard of for God to work this way.

Remember the genealogy? The women listed were all outside the "norm", and yet God used them to advance His plan.

Mary will be no different, Joseph. This genealogy of GRACE is reassuring us all, isn't it? God can and does take the broken and downtrodden, lifts them up and uses them for His glory.

It's about the heart, as it always is. Yes, Mary is pregnant, and no Joseph, she did not have an affair. It was by the Holy Spirit. This child, your child isn't going to be just any kid on the playground.

"She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us)."

-Matthew 1:21-23 ESV

Here is the gospel, as Chuck Swindoll put it, in it's embryonic form, just as Jesus in Mary's womb.

Jesus-He will save His people from their sins. He is Immanuel -God with us.

So simple, and yet so powerful in its simplicity, isn't it? All the pain and confusion, so agonizing to Joseph, is relieved by this visit. All of his questions that he has been wrestling with seemed to be answered here.

Let's just pause now gentlemen and think: How would we respond to a story such as this? To such crazy claims, most especially if you knew your fiancée, and her becoming pregnant was so out of character for her and her God-centered heart,

She was after all, saving herself for you. Yet, this comes at you, and then off she goes for three months to visit Elizabeth, presumably to see the "sign" of another pregnant woman.

"In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she

exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

-Luke 1:39-45 ESV

Mary is reassured, and Joseph believes the angel. Listen, God always speaks to everyone involved in something like this. This wasn't left to chance, or left to a hopeful, "I think this is God's will."

Again, Joseph believed the angel, he faced his fears and he acted in faith. Character -born out of his relationship with God.

You see, Mary knew who she had been betrothed to. She knew his heart, his mind, and how he loved the Lord. She trusted him, so much so that she shared the truth with him.

As crazy as it was, she told him everything. Mary, in every real way, put her very life in his hands. What trust, what love.

Two people who knew their God, knew their Bible, and knew each other! Joseph would put aside a quiet life in order to step into the role of father for a son who was not "technically his".

He let go of his reputation for the sake of his bride, and obedience to God. This child would be his, and people would wonder and question his reputation from that point onward.

"When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus."

-Matthew 1:24-25 ESV

He did the right thing and left all the consequences in the hands of God.

Joseph's character is one we can and should learn from, gentlemen. What an example.

But that's all for now, let's pray.