

Christmas ... Matthew 1.18-25 Only God Could Dream This Up. WWC 12.24.23

Good morning and Merry Christmas. It is a joy to celebrate another Christmas season with you. Our text this morning covers a story that has become so familiar we tend to gloss over it. But imagine you are hearing this story for the first time. A couple is engaged to be married. Life is ahead of them. All the hopes and dreams that come with finding a spouse fill the front of the consciousness of these two individuals. And then the unthinkable happens. Not only does one of them cheat on their fiancé, but now there is a baby involved. I'm not sure that anyone of us would use this as the background narrative for which to set the Christmas story. But this is the very experience of Joseph, Jesus' stepfather.

Of course, we know the story from start to end. Matthew does a spectacular job giving us a synopsis of the birth narrative of the Christ with just enough detail to recount historical events and pierce the heart of the least compassionate of individuals. There is much to be gleaned from this story, which is so entangled in Old Testament promises, and so human a story that from the very beginning it cries out for divine intervention, and certainly, only God could have dreamt of a way to introducing His Son to the world in this way. Just think about that for a moment. *Christ's birth, which was only assumed to be a result of the betrayal of love, foreshadows the great betrayal He would experience on His way to the cross to pay for the sins of the world.* Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus with a kiss, Peter, James, John, Andrew, Matthew, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, James the Son of Alphaeus, and Judas the son of James, who abandoned Jesus in the time of His passion, all close the chapter on Jesus' life as it began, displaying one of the most brutally human experiences of mankind, the pain of betrayal.

And yet attached to the visage of this horrid masterpiece, is the glorious glow of God's amazing gift of redemption. As the story unfolds and beckons for mercy, we see a woman vindicated by God, a man rescued from sorrow, and a family born to serve the world, so that ultimately, all who turn to Christ for hope and salvation from sin are brought into the covering of Christ's first family of His Father and the Holy Spirit.

I want to walk through this little narrative this morning by considering the literary structure of this text. After all, this is a narrative, a story and every good story brings us into the **conflict** found in this passage, and the **resolution** at the end.

.I. The Conflict. The conflict is ultimately in consideration of what Joseph presumed about Mary, that she had been unfaithful. The text says in **verse 18** that she was found to be with child. In other words, she was pregnant, and it

showed. We can imagine Mary's own state of concern, I mean, how do you begin that conversation with anyone, let alone your fiancé. We are not told about any divine experiences that her family had to help rectify this issue for them, as was the case with Joseph. But then, Zachariah and Elizabeth may have been a good buffer for her family. But I rather think that someone who has experienced the power of God as Mary did, knew that whatever the fallout of this experience, God would deliver her.

The person who was completely in the dark about these things was Joseph. In God's providence, He left Joseph in ignorance of the issue until the tension boiled over. *You see, God directs experiences in our lives that though they cause pain ultimately bring forth joy.* That seems a little harsh to be sure, but lest we implicate God as being immoral for doing this, we must remember that we do the same thing as loving human beings. Parents who discipline their children are bringing some sort of pain in their lives to train a protective or dignified life pattern in their children. Surgery causes pain in order to correct pain, which we hope results in feeling better. Coaches demanding another lap, or more practice on the basics are another example, and certainly we could go on with examples. The point is that God is not immoral for doing something painful to us that will bring about good. He, after all, is holy and good and will always fulfill righteousness through His actions towards us. The greatest example is the life of Jesus Christ. Our text tells us that this little life of Jesus would bring great joy, but it would be through pain. Mary would experience the pain of standing at the foot of Christ's cross as her Son bore the sins of the world, and Jesus would endure the cross for the joy set before Him, the knowledge of redemption and beauty for all who look to Him for eternal life.

But here is a question, why would God wait to clarify for Joseph what He was doing before Joseph found out the way he did? I think I can suggest two reasons for which the Lord would prepare this experience like this, that makes sense given the context. One reason is that **God is underscoring for us that this child was not conceived by any normal means.** Matthew writes in such a way that the reader is told **6 or 7 different** ways that Mary was a virgin and had no intimate relationship with Joseph. **First, verse 18,** Mary was **betrothed** to Joseph and **Second before they came together,** she was **found to be with child, (Third) by the Holy Spirit.** The betrothal period didn't guarantee purity, it was likely in that culture for young women that had not yet been married, but there was also a chance of a moment of passion, so Matthew underscores that it was before they came together. **Then (fourth),** Matthew **reiterates** the means through which Mary conceived. In **verse 20** an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and says that Mary's conception is from the **Holy Spirit.** **Fifth,** to make sure that there is no pagan confusion as if the Holy Spirit had acted as myth describes demigods, that He has come down and approached Mary in a sensual way,

there is a citation given from **Isaiah. Verse 23**, a **virgin would conceive** and bear a Son called Immanuel. **Sixth**, it is reiterated in **verse 25** that Joseph did not have intimacy with Mary until after she gave birth the Jesus. **Finally**, Joseph's response could account for a seventh way of underscoring Jesus was not conceived by normal means. We read that he knew that he was not the one who caused the pregnancy and was looking to legally remove himself from this relationship. We will remember that in that time engagement was a legal marriage that awaited consummation, and so a divorce had to take place for them to be separated. Joseph's response only accentuates that he was not involved, and that may have been one of the major reasons God left Joseph in the dark.

This has led me to consider why the Lord would orchestrate these events this way. I submit two reasons for which the Lord would prepare this experience like this. **First**, it is underscored that Jesus was not conceived by normal means, and **second**, that this would test Joseph's faith. You see, nothing tells us more about ourselves than how we respond when there is pain which causes deep sorrow. Notice how care is taken to underscore his character. Joseph is distinguished as a just man who did not seek any more pain to come upon his fiancé than what she may have already experienced, and would experience, so he resolved to divorce her.

Another example of Joseph's just character is given in what is said in **verse 20**, "**as he considered these things**." He was a thoughtful, intentional person, at least when it came to big issues. Certainly, Joseph was mulling this over day and night, but there are few places where thought happens most as when we go to bed with deep concerns weighing us down. Our minds can't stop turning these things over. It is no surprise that the answer he seeks comes in his sleep. The point I am reaching for, however, is that Joseph was mulling this over. He was not a rash man. He was not overtly punitive. He was measured even in what he sought in justice. **Here is a penetrating question for all of us without exception, what has my response to pain taught me about myself and my need for God?**

You see, Joseph was a just man who trusted God, but we see in this gracious intervention given by God that ultimately what drove all of this meditative precaution was fear. What will happen if _____? Joseph could have outlined a list of things that would transpire in moving forward with this relationship, but ultimately, we see this distill into one problem from which all the fear was coming. In moving forward with this relationship, he would be identifying in some way with all the shame and pain which Mary would herself bear. **Verse 20**, "**Do not fear to take Mary as your wife *for* that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit**." Attaching himself to this marriage meant attaching himself to this child and what people would say about how that child came to be. And is this not the greatest cause of our

lack of faith or faithfulness as people? If I believe this Christian stuff, what will happen to my network? What will my friends or parents think? If I follow Christ, I have to unfollow my lifestyle. If I follow Christ, I am identifying with a religion that has not always had the best track record. The scripture is so relevant, isn't it?

This leads us then from the consideration of conflict seen in this passage to the resolution.

.II. The Resolution. What was the means through which Joseph could find peace again in the midst of this hardship? Well, it was in hearing God and obeying God. Please understand that it wasn't just the part about Mary that Joseph heard. Matthew begins his narrative with a genealogy. We considered that topic last week. Just notice the contrast in the genealogy to what the angel, who is unnamed, suggests. **1:16**, Joseph's dad is Jacob, Joseph is proximately the son of Jacob. But the angel calls Joseph the son of David, who is Joseph's grandfather many times removed. In one breath the angel connects Joseph to a heritage he knew he had. A heritage that would be the means through which God blessed the world, a King who would rule righteously and whose Kingdom would never end. Which means it would always be a Kingdom of righteousness. Joseph was reminded of the promises of God and was being told that he was made part of that.

Dear Christian in the storm right now, hear the Word of God to you: 1. You are blessed by God in Christ with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places. 2. You are the chosen of God in Christ from before the foundation of the world. 3. You have been chosen to be holy and blameless before God. 4. You are loved and so predestined for adoption to God through Jesus Christ and for God's purposes. 5. You ARE for the praise of His glorious grace. 6. You are blessed in the Beloved. 7. You are redeemed through Christ's blood. 8. You are forgiven for your trespass according to the riches of God's grace. 9. You are lavished with grace. 10. You are lavished with all God's wisdom and insight. 11. You are recipients of the mysteries of His will. 12. You are obtainers of an inheritance having been predestined. 13. You are for the praise of His glory. 14. You are those who have believed in Him. 15. You are those who have been sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. 16. You are the saints in Christ Jesus. 17. You are partners in the gospel. 18. You are God's elect. 19. You are the flock of the Good Shepherd who gave His life for you. 20. You are a city set on a hill. 21. You are Christ's bride which He adorns and makes beautiful in holiness. 22. You belong to the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. 23. You belong to the One of whom it is said that from Him and to Him are all things. 24. You are the people of God.

The resolution in your story, the path of peace in your life, begins by remembering who you are! It is also obtained by obeying God in doing what

we are called to do. **Verse 24**, when Joseph got up the next day he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded, and the journey with Christ began. If you are struggling for peace in your life, make sure that there is nothing in your life that is minimizing your faithfulness to what God has called you to be as a Christian. Make sure you are being obedient to Him. And make sure that you remember who you are in Christ! God will see you through, for you are His!

But perhaps you are struggling for peace because you are afraid of becoming a Christian for whatever reason. Please consider the lives of those who have followed Christ and how God changed them and gave them a life full of adventure and relationships they never dreamt they could have; a life that culminates in eternal life and peace. Here the words of the apostle Paul who experienced all this change and relationship. He gives testimony of his life with God by remembering Christ's obedience and God's blessing of Christ, which results in our blessing. **Romans 1:3–6**, “³ concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴ and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, ⁵ through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, ⁶ including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.”

My friend, the Christmas story is about the gift of life and eternal life. It is about new and beautiful relationships and the most important relationship, becoming a child of God. What fear is keeping you from coming to Him? What fear is keeping you from enjoying and obeying Him? Remember who God wants to make you and believe on the name of Christ and be saved from your sins. Remember, Christian, who you are and rest in Him by obeying His commands. You will see Him move and provide for you in ways that only God can dream of! Amen, and may your Christmas be merry because Jesus is your treasured gift.