

Pastor Jon's sermon from Sunday, December 22, 2019

Text: Matthew 1:18-25

“Joseph: What a man, what a man, what a mighty, mighty, good man.”

Holy Humor: Why did Rudolf the Red Nosed Reindeer get a bad report card? Because he went down in History.

Today we get Matthew's version of the Christmas Story. On Christmas Eve, you will hear Luke's version. Then on Christmas Day you will hear John's version of the Christmas story known as the Prologue. I love Matthew's version because our humanity is on full display. It gets down to the nitty gritty of relationships, social ethics, decision making, and the challenges of living by faith. And Matthew is the only Gospel that really gets into the heart and mind of Joseph.

To set the stage, Mary is pregnant by the Holy Spirit before she is married. This presented a problem for Joseph. To the public this looked like adultery on Mary's part. Joseph was already publically engaged to Mary, so her being pregnant before marriage, not by him, was a punishable offense under Jewish Law. She could have been stoned in a public square. So Joseph, being a righteous man, didn't want to publically shame Mary or hurt her. So he decided to divorce her quietly. His mind was made up. But God had other plans. Joseph was from the line of David, and according to prophecy, the Messiah was to come from the line of David and be born in Bethlehem to a virgin.

While Joseph was sleeping, an Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream saying, “Joseph, Son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will have a son and you are to name him Jesus.” Here Joseph is being called by God to operate outside of the social norms. Joseph is being called to risk public ridicule and follow God's call.

In other words, the Angel is telling Joseph, “Who cares what others think and take Mary as your wife. And when you name the child, you are adopting Jesus as your very own.” Joseph will then become Jesus'

legal earthly father through adoption. To strengthen the argument, the angel quotes our first lesson from Isaiah, that a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel. God with us.

When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel commanded him. He took Mary as his wife. He listened to the call. Wow, what a humble move.

Joseph is an example of stepping out in faith, even when the odds are stacked against him. I am impressed with Joseph's willingness to listen to God's call and change his mind. Some of us get so set in our ways. We are stubborn and don't want to listen to God or God's Word calling us to change. We have made up our mind about a person or situation and leave no room for the Holy Spirit to change our hearts and minds about them.

Poet Ann Weems, in her book, "Kneeling at Bethlehem" and poem "Getting to the Front of the Stable" reflects on Joseph's bold move:

God-chosen, this man Joseph was faithful in spite of the gossip in Nazareth, in spite of the danger from Herod. This man, Joseph, listened to the angels and it was he who named the Child Emmanuel.

This Christmas, let us give thanks to God for this man of incredible faith into whose care God placed the Christ Child.

Adoption is a gracious act. For our family, even though we haven't legally adopted Marcella, we are her legal guardians. The love we have for her is the same love we have for the other children. It hasn't been an easy road, dealing with the courts, family dynamics, and even our own family having to adjust to such a change. But look at all the blessings a child can bring. When you say yes to God's call, hold on for the ride. It will be bumpy at times. But you can experience great blessings, too.

Amen!