

Pastor Jon's Sermon on the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent about Joseph.

Dec 18, 2022

Text: Matthew 1:18-25.

Today I want to talk a little bit about Joseph. This is the one time in our 3 year lectionary cycle where we learn a little more about Joseph in the Gospel of Matthew.

As you know Joseph was a carpenter who made a public commitment to marry a woman from Nazareth named Mary.

But after their engagement, life got a little messy.

To steal a line from a movie, "There was something about Mary."

Mary got pregnant before her and Joseph had marital relations. And Joseph, didn't have to go on Mauri Povich to know he wasn't the father. Mary told him that her pregnancy was from God. But Joseph didn't believe her at first.

Knowing that Mary's out-of-wedlock pregnancy would bring shame to Joseph and Mary, and potentially cause Mary to be stoned in a public square according to Leviticus for committing adultery, Joseph decided to dismiss Mary quietly.

But Joseph was a good guy. In the gospel of Matthew, Joseph was described as righteous man. According to Debie Thomas in the Journey with Jesus blog back in 2019, this meant that Joseph was a man devoted to God. He just wanted to live a clean, ethical life. He was hard-working and honest... a rules follower. Matthew described him as a guy who didn't want to make waves. Like most of us, Joseph just wanted a "normal" uncomplicated life. Is that too much to ask?

But in the middle of the night, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream with this message:

"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. <sup>21</sup>She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

Whenever you see the words, “Do not be afraid” in the Bible, you should be afraid. A call story is coming... where God calls an average human, to do something extraordinary on God’s behalf.

God actually needs Joseph to fulfill the Old Testament prophecies that the Messiah will come from the lineage of David. Joseph is a direct descendent of David. Joseph is being called to adopt Mary’s child and claim him as his very own heir... a total act of love and grace on Joseph’s part.

How hard must this have been for Joseph... to step out in faith and believe Mary and the angel... to accept a messy life of following God’s call? How hard is it for us to step out in faith and trust in God to guide our lives and our decisions?

<sup>24</sup>When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took Mary as his wife.

This call was not the uncomplicated life Joseph hoped for. Debi Thomas described it this way, “It required Joseph to become the talk of the town — and *not* in a good way. It required him to embrace a mess he had not created. To love a woman whose story he didn’t understand, to protect a baby he didn’t father, to accept an heir who was not his son.” This was pure grace on Joseph’s part. But isn’t this the very essence of our God? To be gracious and kind.

Isn’t this what our Emmanuel, God with us, does for us? God loves us and accepts us “as is” in Jesus Christ. God adopts us in Jesus Christ in our baptism. And ultimately Jesus does the extraordinary work on the cross to save us from our sins and the times we run away from God... which is daily.

It is clear that following God’s call is not the easy road in life. Life will get messy. However, it should comfort us know that as Christians, God operates in the messiness of life. The cross is the best example of this. God is most present when we are hurting. God knows what it is like to be human. God cares about our daily struggles... and those tough decisions that run counter to what the world says to do. Emmanuel is with us.

May our “yes” to God thwart our neat and tidy plans that never seem to work out as we plan, and may the grace we receive today send us out to go tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born into a messy world. Amen