

Christmas Through the Eyes of...
...Joseph
Matthew 1:18-25
First Sunday of Advent
December 1, 2019
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Matthew 1:18-25 (NRSV) The Birth of Jesus the Messiah

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah^[a] took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. ²⁰ But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “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. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²² All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ²³ “Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.” ²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, ²⁵ but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son;^[b] and he named him Jesus.

Through Advent the adult Bible study group is discussing Adam Hamilton’s book Faithful, Christmas Through the Eyes of Joseph which has spawned our sermon series through Advent – *Christmas Through the Eyes of...*

Today we’ll peer through Joseph’s perspective and see what Christmas is intended to be if we saw and experienced things like Joseph did.

What does Christmas mean to you?

In our study video, they went out to the street and asked folks. The “average” – responses were that Christmas had to do with presents and family. And more presents.

Pretty secular wouldn’t you agree?

Stevie Wonder recorded a song called “What Christmas Means to Me” in 1967 and the first verse includes lyrics about candles and mistletoe, ice and snow, and choirs singing carols.

Poor dear! THAT'S what Christmas means???

Others responded that Christmas is stress, that maybe we should only celebrate Christmas every five years to reduce overspending and the hassle of decorations. Bah humbug!

But is that what Christmas is supposed to be?

I'd say that we, Sunday pew sitters, could shout an emphatic "NO" – especially as we look around our decorated sanctuary. Shut out of your minds the to-do lists in your pocket...and look...through the eyes of Joseph.

Kim read for us the Matthew version of "how" it came to be. Just before today's verses is the genealogy of Joseph. It's quite a family tree, really, with a few notorious twigs on the branches.

Throughout Scripture we're given glimpses about WHAT Christmas was. For Joseph, first, Christmas was a time of...

...fulfilled prophecy. We can read in Luke's gospel (2:4, NKJV)

⁴ Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David,

Now "went up" is a phrase that always throws me.

I hear neighbors say "We're going up to Cripple Creek" and I cringe!

Cripple Creek is SOUTH from where we live. That's DOWN!

BUT, the elevation is higher there. So, while I'd say they were going DOWN to Cripple Creek – they ARE going up...higher.

Same thing with Joseph's travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem.

It was a trip SOUTH. [Down.]

Put the elevation was higher.

Hence...Joseph "went up" to Bethlehem.

The point is, that by coming to Bethlehem, Joseph, and his young bride are fulfilling a prophecy of Micah (5:2) telling where the Messiah would be born:

*“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Though you are little among the thousands of Judah,
Yet out of you shall come forth to Me
The One to be Ruler in Israel,
Whose goings forth are from of old,
From everlasting.”*

God can move people and evolve circumstances to make sure that the words God gave to the writers of our Scripture are kept...and that prophecy will be fulfilled. That “silly thing” of the census that required that they come *up* to Bethlehem *moves* them.

So God used a pagan king, Caesar Augustus, to make a decree to *require* Joseph and Mary to be in the city of David, Bethlehem.

And not just the PLACE but the lineage of BOTH Joseph and Mary comes from David, fulfilling the prophecy in Isaiah (9:6-7 NIV):

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.

He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

There are more in Scripture, but just these tell us that Christmas was prophecy fulfilled.

But, wouldn’t you agree that with the fulfillment came *extreme* inconvenience.

That even happens to us, doesn’t it?

Those times when *we know (!)* that God’s will and purposes are being advanced THROUGH US, but we find we’re inconvenienced.

And because we’re flawed humans, too often we see those disturbances NEGATIVELY!

It’s OUR plans and agenda!

And sometimes, they come into conflict with GOD'S plans and agenda. But, when we choose God's choice, we truly can find joy in the obedience...even when WE feel inconvenienced.

Which leads us to something else Joseph brings through his vision of Christmas.

Talk about obedience!

The whole reason that Joseph traveled those 80 miles (a week of walking) with Mary in her "condition", was to be registered. Not only is he complying with the decree for the census but, because he's Jewish, he has a double whammy. He has to travel to the place of his ancestry.

And Joseph complied obediently.

Inconvenienced? Yep!

But, as we study Joseph, we know that his obedience had begun about nine months earlier in three ways. In fact, his obedience, in Matthew's writing is called "righteousness."

As Kim read, first, Joseph "*did as the angel told him.*"

He was righteous...virtuous...he was obedient.

I pray that others could say about us, "They did as God told them." Amen?

That obedience was awkward at the very least.

Joseph stayed in his relationship with Mary, keeping her from public scrutiny (and worse – OT laws would have had her stoned to death!)

But Joseph kept Mary safe.

And he probably experienced ridicule for years:

- "Is this not Jesus, the "son" of Joseph?"
- Isn't this the carpenter's "son"?

What's more, not only did Joseph marry her, but he didn't have marital relations with Mary until after Jesus was born we learned in today's last verse.

Nobody else would have been privy to that fact, but Joseph was an honorable and obedient man.

Joseph reminds us that *whatever* our call is from God, which sometimes isn't easy or conventional, it *IS always right*.

Finally, Joseph's most important obedience was in naming the child as he was instructed. He named him Jesus.

Traditionally, the honor of naming a child was the father's job.

So, Jesus could have been named something else.

But Joseph was obedient and as it turns out, Joseph DID have the honor...it's just that Jesus' Father TOLD Joseph what to name the baby and he did!

"He called His name Jesus" (Scripture says) which means "Jehovah is salvation."

Back just a couple verses today, the angel Gabriel tells Joseph to name the baby

"Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins."

Jesus came to be our Savior.

He knew, before he stepped out of Heaven and into his mother's womb that He was coming to be born to die for OUR sins.

This wasn't unexpected for Jesus.

And it wasn't something He had to make up as He went along.

The plan wasn't forced on Him...

...And, He wasn't surprised once He got here.

Jesus came with the divinely planned purpose to reconcile God and humanity.

He explained His job description as this:

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45 NIV)

Does that sound like a man who was unsure of Himself or His mission?

NO!

Charles Spurgeon, an 18th century Christian writer said it well –

"The name Jesus is the name that perfectly express what our Lord really does. He saves people from their sins."

There are many other things to learn about Christmas through the eyes of Joseph. including:

- Loving a child who isn't ours biologically – as if they were our own legacy.
- Disciplining and teaching that child – whether with skills for a trade like being a carpenter, or about forgiving someone, or how to treat others.

However, for today, let's consider just the attributes we have worked on... and what Joseph's viewpoint brings US to consider this Advent season.

Remember Advent, comes from the Latin word *adventus* meaning "coming" or "visit" and during Advent we prepare for and anticipate the celebration of Christ's first coming.

Perhaps we could even be bold and anticipate with our preparation *this Advent season*, for Christ's return!

So, in this time of preparation, anticipation, and focus:

Are we willing to be inconvenienced in order for God's plans and purposes for Creation, God's "pasture" the Church, as we talked about last week, to be advanced?

Are we willing to do something extra for those who bear the image of God in their faces?

And doing personal acts of piety – like studying Scripture and praying?

Yeah, those things may inconvenience us...but like Joseph, can we be obedient to do *everything* that God is telling us to do?

And...

Have we trusted Jesus as our one hope of salvation.

He told us that He IS the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Salvation doesn't come from anyone else.

Have you accepted that, clear down in the nitty-gritty places of your soul?

And, have you stepped out – possibly being *inconvenienced*, to share about YOUR salvation with someone ELSE? Their eternal lives depend on it. And what, REALLY, are you inconvenienced by taking the time to share with them.

Learn how to DVR *that* rerun...and be obedient to God's call - righteous like Joseph – and maybe a little inconvenienced to share that the God Who created the universe, cares about YOU enough to say, "I love you. I am with you. And I am for you."

What a celebration is coming in just a few weeks.

That no matter who we are, where we've come from, or what we've done, the Good News of Jesus the Savior is for US.

Amen!