

Songs of the Savior

Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: Matthew 1:18-25, 2:13-23

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Our kids have gotten old enough now that they will ask my wife and I what we want for Christmas. They're 13, 10, and 6. And whenever they ask my wife what she wants for Christmas, the answer is always the same. It doesn't matter when they ask or how they ask. She always says she simply wants peace. That's what she wants for Christmas. And they'll laugh and they'll say, "No, really, mom. What do you want?" And she says, "No, really. I just want peace." It would be great. So they turn from her and they look at me and they say, "Dad, well, what do you want for Christmas?" And I'm usually honest with them.

And so I will share with them the next woodworking tool that I want because, of course, I don't need it. And so this year, my six-year-old daughter said, "Dad, what do you want for Christmas?" And I said, "Well, honey, I'm glad you asked. I would love to have a CNC machine." So, of course, she asked, "Well, what is a CNC machine?" And so I explained to her what it is and how it works. And so she says, "Okay. Well, that's great. How much does it cost?" And I said, "Well, I think I could get by with one that cost about \$2,000." And so then she just laughs and says, "Dad, I can't afford that.

What do you really want for Christmas?" And so I spent some time thinking about that. And I think I have my answer now of what I want for Christmas. I would like obedience. That's what I want for Christmas. I want my kids to be obedient. I want them to listen the first time I tell them it's time for bed. I don't want to go through the whole charade of, "Okay, it's time for bed." And then a million excuses. This is not just my family, right? Okay. Good. So they got a million excuses.

I want them to listen the first time when I tell them, "Hey, will you please set the table for your mom?" I want them to stop fighting with each other and be obedient. I want them to brush their teeth the first time I tell them, "It's time to go brush your teeth." I want them to put their dirty clothes in the hamper instead of on the living room floor. I would like my kids to, when I ask, "Stop using an outside voice inside the house." See, I told you my family was normal, right? I actually have amazing kids. They're really good, but they do normal kid things that sometimes drive us crazy.

And so as a parent, I thought if I could have one thing for Christmas, I would just love for my children to be obedient. And it's not this kind of ruler or master type thing. I want them to be obedient because I actually want them to develop good habits. I want them to be safe. I want them to love Jesus. And I simply want them to be a productive member of society. And so sometimes I think to myself, "Is this too much to ask?

Is it too much to ask as a parent?" We truly do have their best interest in mind. And we know it's not always going to be easy for our children to be obedient, but we love them, and we just want to prepare them for the real world. And I'm even mad at myself for saying that because I hated hearing my dad tell me that. Joel, I'm just trying to prepare you for the real world. But yet, isn't this similar to what God desires from us?

I think about this from a spiritual perspective, that God desires our obedience because He wants what's best for us. He's trying to protect us oftentimes and to prepare us for what is coming in our lives. But obedience,

even for us, is hard, especially when we think we know better. You see, sometimes our children don't want to be obedient because they think they know better.

And oftentimes with God, we are not obedient because we feel we know better. We just watched a short video of what might possibly have been going through the mind of Joseph when he had to travel to Bethlehem with his pregnant wife for a census so that his family could be counted. As I watch that video, I wonder what types of emotions were going through Joseph's mind. Is it possible that he was angry? Was he anxious?

Could he have been confused or scared or uncertain? One of the things that frustrates me about Scripture is that we do not have a lot of information about Joseph. I wish that we knew more about his story. What was he thinking? What was he feeling? How did he process all of this? And even after Jesus is born, what does life look like for Joseph? But what we do know about Joseph, the peace that we are given as we see the character of Joseph is that we find he was obedient.

God had to reveal to him in a dream that actually what is happening is from God. And so he's thinking, "Okay, that's great, but how am I going to explain that to everybody else?" But yet he was obedient. And so the question for us today that we should ask, how are we at being obedient to what God asks of us? This Christmas season, how are you and I obedient to what God asks of us? I want to unpack that and look at that in a little more detail.

Let's pray and then we'll jump in. Heavenly Father, obedience is difficult. It's hard to always listen to what you ask us to do. There's so many times that we feel we know better. We can do it a different way. And Father, if we're honest, there's times that we feel that our way is better for us.

So Lord, I pray as we look at the life of Joseph and as we are able to read about his obedience in extremely difficult circumstances that we would be encouraged as well to be obedient to a loving heavenly Father that wants what's best for us. So may we put our trust in you. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. You see, as we look at Joseph in this story that many of us are familiar with, if you've been raised in the church, we talk about this story every single Christmas.

But one of the things that we recognize about Joseph is that Joseph obeyed God in difficult times. And one of the hardest times for you and I to be obedient is during the difficult times and seasons of our life. You see, when life isn't going the way we expected, when our dreams aren't being fulfilled, our wishes, our desires, the things that we have pictured in our minds for a long time, maybe during the Christmas season of what Christmas is going to look like.

Maybe you're older and your kids are grown up now and they have kids and you have in your mind this image of what Christmas is going to look like and your kids are going to come home and everybody's going to get along and we're just going to have a great Christmas, but that's not what it ever looks like because somebody is always fighting or somebody is not talking to so-and-so and siblings aren't getting along or you know you have a broken relationship with spouses or things like that. And so we have these difficult seasons and it's in those difficult seasons that it becomes extremely difficult to obey God.

Think about Joseph for a moment. Joseph is in possibly one of the most difficult seasons of his life. His fiancée, Mary, is pregnant and he hasn't slept with her. She is telling him that this is from God. And in the midst of that, Joseph makes a righteous decision. This is where we get to see part of his character, part of his heart. He makes a righteous plan moving forward with the information he has. So look at this in Matthew chapter 1, verses 18 and 19.

Matthew tells us this is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about. His mother, Mary, was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Yet because Joseph, her husband, was faithful to the law and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace,

he had in mind to divorce her quietly. This is where we see Joseph. He decides to step away quietly. He doesn't want to make a big deal.

He doesn't want to parade merry around for possibly what she's done. It was the most forgiving act that he could do while still being obedient to the law. It was an act of grace. It was an act of mercy. I'm sure it was still difficult. But Joseph made a plan, okay? This isn't how I thought this was going to happen, but I'm going to do the most righteous thing I can. But the problem is that wasn't God's plan. So we go on in verse 20.

But after Joseph had considered 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 home as your wife because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus because He will save His people from their sins. All this took place, Matthew tells us, to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet.

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Emmanuel, which means God with us. So when Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him, and he took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And in fact, he did give him the name Jesus. I must be honest as I read this text, if I were in Joseph's shoes, I think I would have needed a little more than a dream.

I would have needed a little more of an angel kind of speaking to me in a dream. I would have wanted it to be face-to-face when I know I'm awake. I'm not hallucinating, and it's not just because of some bad pizza I ate last night. I would want to make sure this is real. Again, the most difficult time in Joseph's life, and he's calling him to be obedient. I'm not sure I would have wanted to take this on for many reasons as I just make the list. What is my family going to think of me? They're not going to believe the story.

What will the community think as I now have to walk around with the story that I'm going to try to share that nobody's going to believe? What about the time that I'm supposed to get with my new wife when we're newly married, and now we're going to have a child before that even happens? No honeymoon, no celebration. And then my last one. I'm not sure that the first child I raised should be the Messiah. I would have wondered, "Can I get a few practice runs first?" Joseph had no experience raising a child.

How fearful would you be? And it's here that we discover that obedience is not about what others think or know. Obedience is about trust. Obedience boils down to trust. It's about trusting God's plan even when it seems impossible or it doesn't make sense to you. And so I asked the question, "Are you going through a difficult season right now? Can you relate with Joseph?"

Can you relate with the fears, the angers, the uncertainties that God is asking you to be obedient?" And you in your mind are thinking, "This can't possibly be what he wants me to do." I'm here to encourage you that if you remain faithful and you put your trust in God, that amazing things can and will happen.

And when we are obedient to God, even in our difficult seasons, we can experience what Scripture says is the peace of God that surpasses understanding even in the midst of our difficulty. Not only did Joseph obey God in his difficult times, but Joseph also obeyed God in distant places.

You see, if this wasn't enough, after this first dream and Joseph takes Mary and they go to Bethlehem and the baby is born in the barn, and we know the story, if that wasn't bad enough or hard enough, Joseph has another dream only a little bit later in Matthew chapter 2, verse 13, "When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph again in a dream." And he said, "Get up. Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt.

I want you to stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." So Joseph got up. He took the child and his mother during the night, and he left for Egypt. Joseph doesn't even wait till morning to be obedient to this command that the angel gives him. But I suppose if you and I knew that my

new wife, my child are in danger, their life is going to be taken, you would pack up everything early soon and you would head out.

But think about this, what the angel and what God has asked Joseph to do, pack up and head to Egypt. Were they familiar with the city? No, I doubt it. I'm sure he just wanted to go home. Joseph's obedience to God would force them to become refugees fleeing from a tyrannical ruler. Think about that. They were refugees. They couldn't even live in their own land. Here I have this first child.

I remember when I had my first child and the fear of not knowing what to do and how to take care of them. And I wanted family to be around to help us to kind of teach us what we're supposed to do. Joseph is called to leave everybody. And so he and Mary and Jesus traveled to Egypt. They would have each other and God, but they'd have no family, no friends, living in a foreign land. Most theologians and historians believe that they would stay there between two and three years in a foreign land trying to make life happen.

Get a job. Provide for your family. Take care of your son of which an angel has said, "He is the Messiah." Don't mess this up. It's a big responsibility. Maybe this year, you find yourself in a distant place. Maybe it's literally. You're literally far away from family and friends because your job maybe has made you move or other people have moved away. And so you just feel distant.

Maybe it's not literally, but it's emotionally or socially. You just feel distant. You're disconnected from family because of a fight that happened or because of things that are going on. And so today you would just say, "I feel like I'm living in a foreign land," or maybe it's spiritually. Maybe you're here today and you're just thinking, "Man, spiritually, I just feel so disconnected from God." Let me give you some encouragement. First, you need to know you're not alone.

You're not the only one that's ever felt like you're living in a foreign land. You're not the only one that's ever felt distant from relationships, from your family, from your friends, feeling like, "What happened? How did we get here?" I also want to encourage you by letting you know that God promises that He will never leave us or forsake us ever. You're not the only one that's ever felt the way you feel, but Christmas is the celebration of Emmanuel, which means God with us.

He promises to be with us. He isn't far from any one of you. I encourage you to be obedient in the distant places, for there may be a blessing just around the corner, if you will hold on. And finally, Joseph showed us how to obey God in daily life. As Joseph and Mary and Jesus are in Egypt, and they've obviously made life happen. They're living there for two to three years. Yes, they're in a foreign land, but it's like, "Okay, we're starting to make sense of this.

We're starting to figure all of this out." And then we come to Matthew chapter 2, starting in verse 19, where we read after Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph. And at this point, if I'm Joseph, I'd be afraid to go to sleep, wouldn't you? Every time I go to sleep, I have a dream about an angel, and he's telling me to do something crazy. The angel says, "Get up. Take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel. For those who are trying to take the child's life are dead." So Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel.

But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father, Herod, he was afraid to go there. So having been warned in a dream here's another dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets that he will be called a Nazarene. You see, Joseph was obedient every single day.

No matter what the call was, Joseph made life happen. Every time God would give him directions, he was obedient. I want you to take Mary. Okay, I'll do that. Go to Bethlehem. Okay. I will do that. I want you to go to Egypt to protect your wife and your kid. Okay, I will do that. Okay. It's time to leave and go back. Okay, I

will do that. What were all the emotions going through Joseph's mind? Again, excited, nervous, scared, annoyed? It could have been all the above.

But amazingly, despite any of those emotions we have, we only see Joseph's obedience, truly taking one step at a time, one day at a time. He didn't know what tomorrow was going to bring. He didn't know if he went to bed that night, if an angel was going to appear in a dream and tell him to do something different. All we see is Joseph trusting in God one moment at a time. And truly, it is this day-to-day obedience that builds the foundation of our walk with Jesus.

Day-to-day, the small things, the small ways that you are obedient, saying, "Okay, God, I am going to be obedient today." It isn't always easy, but it's what God desires. So maybe this Christmas, you can give a gift to God. What would it look like in your life if you gave this gift to God of obedience that you would say, "Okay, Father, I am finally willing to obey your directions in my life, even if that direction is going to take me on some strange and unexpected path." And so I ask the questions to you, "What is he asking you to do?"

Where is he asking you to go? What does he want you to do with your life? Is there somebody that he wants you to have a conversation with?" Just as our children won't always understand why we ask them to do certain things, you and I also need to know that it is very probable that we will not always understand why God is asking us to do certain things or why He is allowing us to go through certain difficulties. But He knows what is best for us.

So will you and I be obedient like Joseph? You and I may not receive a dream. We may not go to sleep and have an angel that speaks to us and gives us direction. And I know that I often have conversation with individuals that say, "If God would just give me a dream, I would listen, I would be obedient." Let me just encourage you that Scripture says that if you have invited Jesus into your heart and into your life, that Scripture says that you are given the Holy Spirit which is God in you.

He will direct you. He will lead you. He will guide you if you will listen. I think about this story and if Joseph could be obedient when God asked him to marry a woman who was pregnant with God's son, leave his home and travel to an unknown land, finally get settled in that unknown land, and then be told it's time to head back home and take care of the Messiah in the midst of it all, that I'm sure you and I have the ability to be obedient to what God is asking of us.

I don't know what it is. I don't know what your personal journey is. But my prayer is that we would be found to be obedient and faithful in the difficult times, in the distant places, and in our daily life. I know this season is hard for so many, for many different reasons. It's going to be difficult for some this year because this is the first Christmas that they will not be celebrating with their spouse because their spouse passed away.

I know for some, it will be a Christmas that they celebrate and they wonder, "Will this be the last Christmas that I have with my family?" I know for some, Christmas is difficult and it's hard because there's so much strife in your family that when you get together, you know there's going to be some kind of big blow up and you just are dreading it. You think this is not a happy time of the year.

My prayer is that no matter what you're going through, that you would remember one thing. God sent His Son Jesus in the form of a baby with the intended purpose, just as the angel told Joseph that he would take away the sins of the world. He sent Jesus with the intended purpose of dying on the cross so that you and I could have a relationship with Him.

So that no matter what's going on in our life and in our world around us, all of the things that we can't control, the other people that we can't control, the decisions that we can't make for others, that no matter what is going on, that we know God is there with us. He's walking with us. He's loving you through it. He wants you to be obedient because He knows what is best.

May you be encouraged to celebrate the birth of the Messiah as we look forward to Christmas. Let me pray. So today, Father, we ask for that peace that surpasses understanding. There are so many struggles and difficulties in this life for which we don't have answers and we don't understand.

My prayer is that you would wrap your arms around us, that we would feel your presence, that we would be obedient as we celebrate the birth of the king. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.