



gracefellowship

Series: Journey to Christmas
Date: December 11, 2022
1:18-25

Title: Requires Trust
Passage: Matthew

Advent Reading: Joy (Isaiah 35:1-6)

As we continue in this season of Advent I'm thankful that "Joy" is one of the prescribed ways for us to wait on the return of Christ! We have so much to be joyful about. Christians should be the most joyous people on earth! So make sure you are taking time this year to celebrate with joy the fact that Jesus has come and to remember He is coming again!

This morning we are talking about the first arrival of Jesus as we look at the different journeys people took to get to that first Christmas. Last week we talked about Mary and said her journey began by saying "yes" to God. The challenge for all of us is to be like Mary and to be prepared to say yes to all God asks of us—even when we don't fully know what God is doing.

And speaking of not knowing what God is doing...today we are going to look at part of the journey Joseph takes to the first Christmas. One of the things I appreciate the most about the Bible is it includes the messy details to show the reality of God working within a broken world to accomplish His purposes. The reason I like that aspect of the Bible is because our lives are like that, too, aren't they? We have messy lives. Things don't always go according to plan. And because of what we have experienced in our own lives, we can identify with Joseph today as we read his story. So, look at Matthew 1 with me as we jump into the story today.

:: Matthew 1:18-19

18 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.

19 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.

We don't know a great deal historically about Joseph, but we can mine this passage for some good information. We really only see Joseph in the narrative around the birth of Jesus in Matthew and Luke. Then we see Joseph pop up one more time when Jesus is about 12 years old. The family goes to Jerusalem for the Passover and when everyone leaves the city to head home, Mary and Joseph get a day away from Jerusalem before they realize that Jesus isn't with them! They left him in Jerusalem and have to go back, in full panic mode, to find him. And that's the last we see of Joseph. So, we can conclude that it was Joseph's fault they lost Jesus! Mary would never do that, right?

- Can you imagine their prayers heading back to Jerusalem? "Uh...God, we lost your Son! Do you have any more kids you can loan us?" Ok, that's a joke! Don't write me letters about how blasphemous I'm being.

What I'm trying to say is, we don't know much about Joseph because we really only have a few stories where he is present. But here is what we do know...

Joseph was pledged to be married to Mary.

In Jewish culture there were three elements to a marriage relationship.

- Engagement: Typically two sets of parents set up a marriage proposal between a son and daughter- most frequently with the support of the two who would be married. It wasn't exactly what you might think of with an arranged marriage. The people getting married had a say in who they would spend the rest of their lives with.
- Betrothal: During this phase the couple was looked at as if they were married, but the official ceremony had not take place. In the betrothal period the groom would go off to prepare the place they would live once officially married and the bride would wait, not knowing the exact day or time her groom would come back to get her. Often this period would last a year, depending on what kind of house was being prepared.
- Marriage: This is when the official ceremony would unite husband and wife to begin their lives together in the covenant of marriage.

I think as we read the story this morning it is very possible that we are in the betrothal stage of the relationship. Matthew actually tells us, "before they came together"- in other words, before their marriage was consummated- "she was found to be pregnant..." There is a chance that Joseph discovers that Mary is pregnant through the grapevine while he is away preparing their home and making sure everything is ready for their wedding.

Can you imagine getting that news? Picture yourself working hard for months to build a house for your bride and then finding out she is pregnant! This wasn't the way things were supposed to work out.

And unlike us, Joseph doesn't know the full story! We know everything that Luke recorded about Gabriel coming to Mary and telling her she would be the mother of the Messiah. Joseph just knows she is pregnant. Now he has to wrestle with what to do in response.

It's likely if something like this happened to any one of us we would do damage control by trying to control the narrative. Maybe you've had a marriage that blew up in your face. Or you had a job that went south and you were fired. What do we do? We try to get out in front of the story and tell people our side of things so they know it wasn't our fault.

- Our spouse is totally at fault; the employer was awful...whatever it is you feel will help you control the narrative and have the story reflect you in a positive way while making the other person look bad.

Joseph doesn't do that. Matthew tells us the initial thought process- verse 19 said he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But this isn't a cold, calculated step to publicly expose Mary. In fact, this is where we discover two more things about Joseph:

Joseph was faithful to the law, but full of grace.

Matthew tells us that Joseph wrestled over this decision because he was faithful to the law and he knew what the law could require in situations like this. A woman in this culture who was found to be pregnant outside of marriage could be stoned to death. But Joseph was unwilling to expose her to public disgrace and he certainly didn't want her to die. He was merciful and decided to divorce her quietly, simply walking away from the relationship.

Joseph is able to take his pain and find a way to show grace.

Charles Spurgeon once wrote this in response to Joseph's situation: When we have to do a sever thing, let us choose the tenderest manner. Maybe we shall not have to do it at all."

It's not until after Joseph makes this painful decision that God decides to pull Joseph into the bigger narrative. Look at the next part of the passage.

:: Matthew 1:20-25

20 But after he 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.

21 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."

22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:

23 "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.

25 But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

I don't know why God didn't give Joseph a heads up on the pregnancy like He did for Mary. That would have made things a lot cleaner for Joseph. That seems like the kind of conversation you want both people on the Zoom call for, you know? But God has His reasons for everything He does. In the case of Joseph I think God wanted him to learn to trust Him, no matter what story was written.

That's the question, right? **Do I trust God no matter what twists and turns my story takes?**

One of the things we learn as we grow in our faith as disciples of Jesus is that God doesn't do things our way! In fact, Isaiah 55:8 says...

:: Isaiah 55:8

8 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD.

Life gets a lot easier when you learn to trust God's story and figure out that He doesn't think like you and He doesn't behave like you! But He is still trustworthy!

I don't know what some of you are going through right now or what twists and turns your story has taken that have been unexpected, but I want you to know you can trust God's story. That's the message of the angel to Joseph because he assures Joseph that God is not far off, but He is actively involved in each of our lives. I want you to see three things from the message the angel delivers that every follower of Jesus needs to know and live by.

**God is...
Sovereign
In Control
Good**

Look back again at the end of the passage in Matthew 1.

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God is sovereign- the things happening in Mary's life and those things that are impacting Joseph are ordained by God and the result of the Holy Spirit.

God is in control- This is the culmination of thousands of years of prophecy. This is the story God has been weaving throughout the generations. God has been at work even when people didn't see it or couldn't understand what He was doing. There is never a moment when God takes His hands off the wheel.

God is good- There are two names we see in the angel's message to Joseph: "you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." "...they will call him Immanuel (which means God with us)."

- Jesus was coming into the world to bring salvation to His people and to rescue us from our sins. To anyone who places their faith in Jesus as your Savior, he will remove your sins and bring you into His eternal Kingdom. The name Jesus (Yeshua) means, "The salvation of Yahweh."
- The name Immanuel shows us that God doesn't just sit off in the distant expanse of the universe unengaged from us, but that He came to live among us. I've always like the way the Message version of the Bible talks about this:

:: John 1:14

14 The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish.

God's goodness is displayed in His willingness to leave the glory of heaven in order to come make his dwelling place among us and experience life in human flesh.

This sets Christianity apart from every other religion in the world. God humbled Himself; brought Himself low; lived among us; identified with us and then died for us. Why? To bring salvation!

You can trust a God like that.

This week in my discipleship time with my sons as we drive to school we came across this verse from Isaiah that is full of meaning:

:: Isaiah 42:3

3 A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;

Joseph was in a place of brokenness, but He learned to trust God's story. God will not abuse you. In fact, Joseph would have known what Isaiah said and it may be one of the reasons, as a man devout to the law, that he acted in grace and mercy toward her. If God doesn't break a bruised reed or snuff out a smoldering wick, why should we?

(Slides: Picture of reeds)

Illustration: A smoldering wick will relight without even touching the flame to the wick, just get the heat close to it. God is looking to relight your flame, not snuff it out.

Our journey to Christmas requires trust.
Where do I need to trust God?