



WEEK 3 – NAZARETH

CHECK - IN

How are you? Where have you seen God working in your life in the last week? And... have you ever made a gift for someone? How did it turn out... it wasn't a sock-bunny or a mixed tape, was it?

(#ShamelessFriendsReference) Or maybe better, have you ever had someone make a Christmas present for you? (If they're sitting next to you, be kind.)

OPENING PRAYER

God of Connection, help us to foster thin space moments within all our relationships, such that we might feel your presence as we commune with others.

INTRODUCTION

Today, as we continue our Advent Pilgrimage, we're going to look at the journey of a man who made things in a carpentry workshop that

would become the site of an angelic encounter and a choice that would change human history. But we'll come back to that. First, let's pause for a moment and remember why we're doing this. This is week 3 of our series, *Thin Spaces*, where we are taking a pilgrimage through Advent, learning how to slow down, recenter, and prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ on Christmas by intentionally seeking out times, places, and experiences, where the veil between Heaven and Earth gets a little thin. For centuries, Christians treated Advent more like we treat Lent. The weeks that led up to Christmas were for self-reflection and recentering. Advent was slow, patient, reverent, and meditative. Instead, we tend to fill the month with cookie baking, company parties, movie marathons, and laps around Target looking for the cheapest gift we can get our boss without it looking like it was the cheapest gift we could get our boss. And so, for this series, we've been trying to recapture a bit of that original purpose for Advent, the recentering part... because that's the point, right? We should be preparing our hearts for the coming of Christ on Christmas and the celebration that comes with it.

Review Question: Last week, we were challenged to make intentional *thin space* moments by slowing down, focusing our breathing, and praying in the midst of the journey. Were you able to do that this week? Why or why not? If so, how did it go?

THE SCRIPTURE & THE SPACE

So, where do we go from here? Well, we began with the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth in Luke's version of the birth story. Zechariah

reminded us that we have a built-in thin space this season when we come to worship, and Elizabeth reminded us that we can have a thin space moment wherever we are because the Holy Spirit is within us. For the next *thin space* on our Advent Pilgrimage, we're going to flip over to Matthew's version of Jesus's birth and find a young man who was on a bit of a journey himself. Little did he know it was a pilgrimage. His name was Joseph.

Read Matthew, chapter 1, verses 18 through 19.

Given these circumstances, Joseph probably felt like many of us this time of year... going 100mph on an icy road, already in a skid, headed straight for a cliff. Now, many men of this time, given the culture and how they viewed women, would have likely made a scene, a public spectacle, outing Mary, like we see in other stories of women in the Bible. Mary could have been outcast, even killed for this. But verse 19 tells us, Joseph was a good guy. Yes, he's in a tough spot. Sticking with a woman who was pregnant without being married would have meant disgrace for him and his family. Let's face it, no one is going to believe it was a miraculous birth from the Holy Spirit. They'll think the baby his, or if not his, that she's been, shall we say, unfaithful. So, Joseph has a lot to consider. He can't disgrace his family. But, being a good guy, he doesn't want to let her face humiliation or punishment either. So, it says he plans to break things off quietly. Somewhere in the midst of all this, as we know from last week, Mary runs off to see her cousin Elizabeth, leaving Joseph at home in a place that will become our 3rd thin space...

NAZARETH

Nazareth today is a town of about 70,000 people. (See Pastor Mike's pictures from Sunday.) However, back in Joseph's day, it was a small farming town of a few hundred. Today, they've built a church over the ruins where they believe Joseph's home and workshop existed.

There's a staircase that leads down to ruins that appear to be a small home with what could have been a carpentry workshop. Do we know that's where Joseph's home was? Nope. Is it possible? Yup. But somewhere in the vicinity of this church and those ruins, Joseph goes to sleep and has a thin space moment.

Read Matthew, chapter 1, verse 20 through 23.

Here in Nazareth, Joseph has a thin space moment and is left with a choice. Initially, he was going to make the wrong one. But through a dream, an angel appears to him, tells him that this child *is* the Messiah and then gives him the instruction, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife." (v20) Though these sound like marching orders, there's some ambiguity here. It says, "*don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife,*" not, "*you are going to take Mary as your wife.*" It appears he still has a choice.

Question 1: Consider this Scripture. How would you have felt were you Joseph? What would you have done had you been in his shoes?

REFLECTION

We know Joseph makes the right choice, and not just because the next verse tells us. We know because in Nazareth, they have built a church to honor him. Joseph doesn't get this church and shrine if, after the angel gives him the message in his dream, he wakes up and divorces her quietly, as he had planned. Instead, what does he do?

Read Matthew, chapter 1, verse 24.

Joseph does the right thing, even though it might mean being an outcast in this small farming village. (You know how people talk in small towns.) Yet, he does it anyway. And though his angelic encounter is definitely a thin space, there's something depicted in this church that hints at a much deeper, ongoing thin space in Joseph's journey that can help us in ours. Find Pastor Mike's photo of the mural painted in the sanctuary of St. Joseph's church. Here you have a depiction of the Christ child, a little older, and Mary and Joseph as proud parents, (probably at his kindergarten Christmas pageant where he only got to play a shepherd. "You know this is about me, right?") This mural is what they call the Holy Family, and this family doesn't happen if Joseph wakes up and chooses to bail. Yes, the angel appears to Joseph in a dream, but, ultimately, that's not where the thin space was. The most important place where the veil between heaven and Earth got a little thin is in Joseph's choice to take Mary as his wife and be the earthly father and protector of Jesus. It is in answering this call that Joseph encounters the presence of God. And not just because Jesus is God-with-Us, but because Joseph takes his

role seriously to care for these relationships. Joseph's thin space was building a family.

Question 2: Consider Joseph's call to care for and protect Mary and Joseph, to foster these relationships, and to build this family. How was faith displayed in your family? Was church or prayer or religion part of your experience? Was it sufficient or do you wish it was different?

Can you imagine being parent to the Messiah? Most 10-year-olds think they know it all... can you imagine parenting the one who actually does? This last verse holds so much power, when Joseph woke up he took Mary as his wife and built this family. This opens the door to discuss another *thin space* on our journey in Advent. What are you doing to create thin spaces within your family, within your closest relationships? If you are a parent or have a close nuclear family relationship, what are you doing to create thin space moments? Are you making prayer and worship and Scripture a priority? You are the greatest influence on your children's faith, and your kids need you to make thin spaces to help them encounter the presence of God.

Whether or not you have kids, if you have a spouse or partner, how are you creating thin space moments in your relationships? Joseph and Mary had plenty... we'll get to a couple next week... but how are you inviting God's presence into your relationship? If you aren't having intentional thin space moments in your relationship, you're

missing a vital piece of what brings you closer together. “But I’m single... I don’t have a significant other or children, what can I learn from Joseph?” Singles, one of the greatest things you can do is to find thin space moments in a group of close connections. Whether it’s your extended family, siblings or parents, or a friend group or our Connect Group on Wednesday evenings, intentionally seeking out thin space moments in those places can open doors to a surrogate family that fills this role in your life. You’re not off the hook here. Joseph’s answer to the angel’s invitation shows us the importance of creating thin space moments within our homes and our relationships.

Question 3: What can you do to create thin spaces at home or in your relationships? If you have a family, how are you helping them encounter the presence of God? If you’re single, what can you do to bring God into the relationships you have? Or, where do you find thin spaces in community?

CLOSING

Each one of us is called to create *thin space* moments in the home we build, in the family we are responsible for, in the relationships that surround us. Take time to pray in a group, take time to share your faith, take time in the midst of the parties this week to express gratitude, and to build in these thin space moments in your home and relationships. Joseph did that and it changed the world. Would Mary still have been pregnant and birthed the Christ child? Yup, but it would have been a much different story if Joseph had not taken his role in this pilgrimage. Instead he said yes to creating an environment

where he and Mary and Jesus could encounter the presence of God. Will you? Will you create thin spaces in your family, in your home, in your relationships? When you do, you just might change your world and someone else's for the better.

**Take some time to share prayer requests or celebrations
and close in prayer.**