

III. Advent in Biblical Perspective  
*From No News to Good News*  
“The Angelic Ministry of Christmas – Joseph”  
Matthew 1:18-25  
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December 11, 2022 • Sunday Morning Sermon

Matthew 1:18-25 says [18] *Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. [19] And her husband Joseph, being a just (righteous) man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. [20] But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. [21] She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” [22] All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:*

[23] *“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).*

[24] *When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, [25] but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of our God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

The blank page that is right in front of the book of Matthew which you see when you go to this text has been the context for our Advent series this year, which represents the 400 years of silence from God. That's not the first time He had been silent. After He had communicated with Abraham, God told him that His people would be in Egypt under affliction and He would be silent for 400 years. Then He sent Moses to bring them out of bondage. Now in the context of this Matthew text the people are under affliction, but while there was the silence of God during those 400 years, God had not been silent about those 400 years. He tells the people what's going to happen in that 400 years in Daniel 3, 6, and 9 plus other places in Daniel, also in Zechariah, Malachi and Haggai. These were Prophets that spoke the last words in the canon of the Old Testament as they tell them about the sweeping of the Assyrian Empire, then the sweeping of the Babylonian Empire, the Medo-Persian Empire, the Greek empire and now what they have been under for almost 53 years now, the Roman Empire and its oppression upon them. God also told them that at the right time, not only would He speak, but He would speak through His Son.

God has finally spoken in these latter days through His Son, the Lord Jesus, and God breaks His silence in four Divine angelic messages. In some of the extra Biblical literature in the in that arena of the Jewish population at that time it was noteworthy that they pointed out they had, had no prophets, no angelic communication from those divinely created messengers of God. Now, He speaks through four angelic messages that bring us right up to the revelation and the Word becomes flesh – the very birth of Christ there in the stable.

Angels actually long to know what you know. They long to see what we see, but they also long to do what God made them to do. It's interesting that this period of no news is now followed by good news. It's no accident that the opening books of the New Testament are called Gospels – meaning Good News. God brings it initially through these four divine revelations delivered by these angelic couriers that He has sent. The Spirit of God so moved Luke and

Matthew to record these events and Luke gives us three of them. We've already looked at the communication of the angel Gabriel to Zechariah and then to Mary, and now we come to a third communication. Interestingly, in the first two, the angel is identified as Gabriel and the one we will look at in this study is only identified as the angel of the Lord so it could be Gabriel, we just don't know for sure and we are given the setting and dynamics that are around it.

As God begins to communicate His Word after 400 years, there are these amazing parallels. Luke is giving us three of these accounts, and they start in the temple with a divine message through an angel to Zechariah and the last birth narrative ends at the temple with the Savior brought to the Temple with Simeon and Anna. It's packaged in the temple setting.

Another interesting thing, is the first angelic divine revelation through an angel Gabriel comes to a man named Zechariah. The third one comes to another man, Joseph. Both men are bearing what we might call in redemptive history legacy names. Zechariah, who is a priest from his tribe and bears the name of a noteworthy priest and prophet in the Old Testament - Zechariah. Now, Joseph is bearing the name of the one through whom God led the people down to Egypt, and that is Joseph. While Joseph in the Old Testament and this Joseph are sinners needing a Savior, the Bible seems to take pains to record none of their liabilities. I'm sure they had them. They're presented, obviously, as models and encouragements to us, not because they're faultless by any means, but they're presented that way.

Zechariah actually sees the angel standing there at the altar where he is doing his ministry. Joseph encounters the angel speaking in the midst of a dream, which, by the way, is certainly seemingly appropriate in light of his legacy name. Joseph in the Old Testament also received messages from God through dreams, so much that he was called sarcastically, the dreamer. These are some parallels.

These four angelic announcements are all birth announcements. To Zechariah and Elizabeth, it is announced the birth of the one who fulfilled the closing text in the canon of the Old Testament, the last verses of Malachi, which promises before the day of the Lord, I will send one in the Spirit and power of Elijah, who will turn the hearts of fathers to their children in the hearts of children to their fathers (Malachi 4:5-6). Chronologically, the very first message from the throne in Luke, breaking silence is picking up right where He left off 400 years and the one who will fulfill that is John the Baptist.

John is going to come by way of a providentially miraculous birth and He announces to these who are advanced in years beyond the years of childbearing that they are going to bear this child and God has chosen them through which to accomplish this providential miracle. Then He tells them the name they will give the child, John, and He gives him his ministry. He will be a preacher and he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their father. Yes, this does have blessing in the natural family, but I don't think that's what it's pointing to. John the Baptist's ministry is pointing to calling His people to repentance. Who is he calling to repentance? He's calling the fathers of God's covenant family, the leaders, the teachers – he's calling all of those who are in positions of leadership, the fathers of the faith. It's not about you. It's about the Lord and what you will do for the Lord in the lives of God's children. Two times John tells them that. John is looking primarily at the fathers of the faith and the children of God and then the children, when they have leaders that that are there with the servant's heart to lead them to the Almighty, then they their hearts are turned to their leaders, their fathers in the faith.

Then comes another birth announcement in which the angel comes to Mary, and informs her of her calling and that she will bear a Son, Immanuel – meaning God with us – and she is to call His Name Jesus. Mary responds, 'Behold your maidservant, let it be done unto me according

to Your Word.’ That is not her giving God permission. That's her surrendering to the Word of God.

Now we are seeing God's eternal counsel coming into fruition and now comes another angelic ministry – this time an angel comes and speaks to Joseph. The first half of Matthew 1:18 says *[18] Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way.* Luke gives us the focused record of the birth of Christ through the eyes and perspective of Mary and her genealogy which Luke gives in Luke 3. We also see that Elizabeth and Zechariah are connected to Mary, they're relatives. Joseph and Zechariah are connected because they're married to what is likely cousins, so they're connected in that they both married into another family.

Now we get to an account with Matthew who is not giving us the same perspective as Luke. Matthew gives the genealogy of Joseph in Matthew 1:1-17 and he gives us the birth of Jesus from the perspective of Jesus' adopted father. Some have asked me 'Pastor, isn't more accurate to call Jesus Joseph's stepson?' I don't think so but I'm not going to argue with this. First, I think that Joseph has a very specific calling, and it is to function not with all of the dynamics that a stepfather would, but to function as a father, even though the child doesn't come from his seed, yet that Child is coming through his seed through Mary, who is of the seed of David. I believe Joseph is called to raise Him for His calling to save His people from their sins.

This birth announcement, like Zechariah and like Mary, gives us a miraculous birth but this one is not a providentially miraculous birth. Now, what do I mean by that? It is miraculous yet God used the processes that He had put in place, it's just He intervened so the barren womb could bear a Child. This is a redemptive, miraculous intervention. It's not through the means that God accomplishes for it is beyond that – the Virgin conceives. The reason there is this virgin birth – a virgin giving birth – is because of the virgin conception and that's really where we focus our examination. The reason that a virgin gives birth is because of Joseph's obedience.

Matthew 1:18b-19 says *[18b] When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. [19] And her husband Joseph, being a just (righteous) man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.*

Right now in this Matthew text, Joseph and Mary as husband and wife are in step one, betrothal. There were three steps in the marital dynamic of a Jewish marriage. There was step one, betrothal and commitment. Step two, the ceremony and then thirdly, based upon that, there was consummation. Here in Matthew 1 we are told from Joseph's perspective that legally they are already married and that's why they're called husband and wife. In this Jewish process of marriage the betrothal would last for about a year in order for the man to show the father of the bride that he would be able to do what he promised – I will treat her with dignity, will provide for her and protect her. And the woman reveals her commitment of purity and to come alongside the one to whom she's betrothed. So, Joseph and Mary are somewhere in that period of time of betrothal that will be followed by a ceremony that has a wedding feast and then the marriage bed.

They are already husband and wife and many people think of this as how we think today of engagement. No, it's not quite like our engagement, because in our engagement, if decided to end it you would just give the ring back or at least you better give it back. In this case, if it ends after betrothal, there has to be a divorce and some news has arrived to Joseph. The chronology of these past four studies have not been very difficult. We know clearly that Mary came to Elizabeth's, who was already with child, six months pregnant so we know which angel ministry came first which was Gabriel to Zechariah and Elizabeth. We know which one comes second, Mary, because she comes after Elizabeth six months later when she gets her announcement.

Now, I'm a little bit speculative here, but I feel I'm on solid ground. It's clear in this text that Joseph has received news that Mary is with child. The text doesn't tell us if Mary and Joseph have had any conversation about this. There is no record that she talked to him or that he talked to her but there is clearly a message that has come to him that the one to whom he is betrothed, whom he has kept as a virgin, have embraced and committed himself to is going to have a child. It sounds like some man has brought condemnation. Some man has brought sin, and she has complied because she's with child. Joseph could figure this one out, and that's where he is with the news. What is he going to do? We are told he has contemplated, didn't react in anger, given consideration and with the news that he had, he had come up with a plan.

It's interesting to note that both Zechariah and Joseph are called righteous. They're both men who have a test. That doesn't mean they have a righteousness that saves them. That means they've got a solid testimony that God's Word matters to them. God's Word clear in this matter, that there would have to be given a writ of divorce. Normally that was done publicly, but Joseph not only reveals his commitment to God's Word, with no doubt in his mind he will have to divorce her but he wants to do this in the best possible way for Mary. He doesn't want to put her to shame. That is telling us something – they haven't lived in a culture that celebrates sexual promiscuity and sexual perversion. They have lived in a culture that is sensitive to these matters of the sacredness of sexuality only within marriage. Therefore, anything outside of marriage is shameful, sinful and wrong. Joseph wants to do what's right (justice) but he wants to do it with as much mercy as possible so he wants to do this as privately as possible.

What I'm about to say is speculation. This is where I believe this fits in the chronology. This fits for me based on Mary. For some reason, we don't know whether her parents sent her or whether she had a long standing relationship with Elizabeth, but one of the first things that she does upon being pregnant with this child by this virgin conception, is she goes to see Elizabeth. We know that God uses that to fulfill His Word, because as soon as she arrives at Elizabeth's, then the presence of Christ in the womb sent the power of redemption to John the Baptist. Here we see that those in the womb are a real person. The first recorded convert of the incarnate Christ, is John the Baptist as he is filled with the Spirit in Elizabeth's womb. I believe our study this morning is taking place while Mary is with Elizabeth. I don't think Joseph has had time to talk to Mary, but the news has arrived to him. Joseph is now considering what can he do that's righteous, but that is merciful.

In the midst of this, as his namesake, God communicates to him in a dream. Matthew 1:20-25 says [20] *But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. [21] She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."* [22] *All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:*

[23] *"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us).* [24] *When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, [25] but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.*

Now here he bears the name of Joseph, but he is of the Tribe of Judah, because he's the son of David, the tribe of the scepter, the line of David. So he will legally affirm not as the biological father, but as the adopted father. Here's another parallel. When the angel spoke to Zechariah, he said 'Do not fear' because of the astonishing impact of the one from the throne of God in his presence – the angel that brought him to the end of himself. Here the angel says to

Joseph, 'do not fear to do your job, to take Mary as your wife' – do not fear you're not under condemnation. The angel was going to show him why he should not fear by showing Joseph his calling to have a Son that he and Mary are bringing into this world, the presence of the Almighty.

Not only has God not been absent for 400 years now, when He speaks, the One who rules over the affairs of humanity is becoming one of us. God is with us, participating in human history – fully God and fully man. Don't fear that's the child you're going to raise. Don't fear you are not compromising Biblical truth. The one who is bearing your child is still faithful to the word for her conception is as a virgin. The Holy Spirit has come upon her, as in the creation, brooded over her, and as in the creation when the Holy Spirit brooded over the first thing that came was light. Now the Holy Spirit is brooding over the darkness of her unpenetrated womb and from this is coming, the light of the world.

Two times in the text he will tell Joseph for emphasis, the One she carries is of the Holy Spirit – the miraculous fulfillment. God talks to Mary and Joseph separately but gives them the same message as to what to name the Child. God is now with us through you and this birth of the virgin that comes forward. This is Immanuel – God with us and He will be called Jesus because He has a mission, a vocation, a calling. God has come in the flesh for one purpose, and that is to save His people, Jew and Gentile, from every nation and tribe, and bring them to Himself. This is His job. It will be done and the same power of the Almighty that brings Him into this world through this miraculous moment is the One who will be with Him and will raise Him from the dead. He will save His people from their sins and lose not one of them. That's where the promise comes to Joseph.

Joseph is not to fear his calling to be the adopted father and to take care of the appointed mother to bear this Child. Together you will raise Him – the Son of God and Son of Man. You're going to teach Him how to speak, how to do carpenter work, to walk through fields and talk to Him about planting. He's going to get a lot of his illustrations directly from walking with his daddy through life. We're bringing Jesus through you. You're bringing Jesus to them, and Jesus will bring them to glory. Then he tells Joseph that all of this took place to fulfill what the Lord has spoken by the Prophet Isaiah in which quotes to him the prophecy. Joseph wakes up and does as the angel of the Lord commanded him.

In other words, dare I say it, he manned up. The next time somebody says 'Do you really believe the Bible is infallible?' You just take them to this text. All of humanity has been ruled by a sovereign God to fulfill this prophecy. God's Word never fails. God will fulfill His Word and here is the Word of God fulfilled. Joseph, don't fear that same God is going to be with you. God's going to be with His people through His Son and He's using you and Mary. Don't fear and so Joseph comes forward, he steps up to the calling.

Here's a brief thought in terms of the takeaway. Behold a man. Now I'm unapologetically going to say it again. I know it is not politically correct. There is something called Biblical masculinity, Christian manhood. Here's one for you, Joseph. Behold a man. What does the Bible tell us about a man? I Corinthians, 16:13-14 says, *[13] Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. [14] Let all that you do be done in love.* This is a man – strength and courage to embrace his God given responsibilities to his wife, to his children, to life, to his church, and to redemption. Say 'no' to fear. This is embarrassing. Do you know what they're going to be saying about us?

Joseph had to be a man until God called him home and we don't know when he died. I know he was around till Jesus was 12 doing his job. I don't believe he wasn't alive when Jesus went to the cross because I know what he would have done, because I know what I would have

done if they had taken my son to that cross. I think God graciously took him home before he got in the way of things there, but he's strong and courageous to fulfill his calling before God as a man, as a husband, as a father, as a called, gifted steward of Christ. He is strong and courageous, yet sensitive and compassionate in his responsibilities. When he thinks she has been violated not only her commitment to the Lord, but her commitment to him, yet look at his compassion and care for her.

I have studied a unit that fought in the Civil War, the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts, which was the first, "colored regiment." The movie that was made about them is called Glory and it's relatively accurate historically. One of the things they attempt to portray is something that happened before they made the charge on Fort Wagner and they knew 70% were going to die. They knew seven out of ten were not coming back. They had a revival meeting before that night and one of the men stood up who is played by Denzel Washington in the movie, and said, "I don't know for sure what's going to happen tomorrow, but we're going to face the gun of the enemy. We are not going to run from the muzzle. We will face them." Then he said, "We're men, ain't we?" Now, put that in the context of eight generations being told you're 4/5ths of a person and a piece of property – 'we're men, ain't we.'

If there's ever a time we need men of God, it's now. I unabashedly say it. Ladies, I believe this isn't the only thing I can do as a pastor for the women of a congregation, but one thing that's on my heart is to present to your fathers, your husbands, your sons, your grandfathers, all of them – this is what it means to be a man of God for God. Behold a man. We throw the term in Western civilization trying to get this in shorthand with the word gentlemen. They don't have to be somebody by walking over other people. They won't gossip. They won't slander. They won't commit malfeasance. They're going to do the next right, not because they're working their way to heaven, but because heaven came down and did the work to bring them to heaven. Therefore, they want to give themselves as men. They want to act like men.

Just as Latimer said to Ridley at Oxford that day that they burned to death. He said, "Mr. Ridley, play the man." Act like a man. Here's a man. Jesus doesn't, "come out" as the Messiah until He's 30 years old. Joseph lived for 30 years of the life of Jesus or however long he lived up until then, with people mocking, slandering and whispering but he stepped up and he kept his wife a virgin until their marriage. Then he took Jesus and raised Him with his brothers and his sisters. Joseph did his work so much that Jesus was called the son of a carpenter. He provided and protected. Mary didn't have to wonder if Joseph was off in a midlife crisis somewhere. By God's grace, Joseph was able to be a man that we can learn from in teaching men to be men of God.

I just long and pray for young men to know here at Briarwood, there is a place to learn how to be a man for God, by God and owned by God. We won't do it perfectly, but we're committed to doing it. Ladies, just like we wipe away all the mariology and aberrations. Look at Mary a woman for God – I'm your maidservant. I'm willing to take this on. Let it be done to me according to Your Word. Why? Like her husband, her trust is in the Lord that banishes fear and that overflows with love and joy.

In conclusion, behold The Man, Jesus, who will come in this glorious moment. Behold Him in all of His glory. See Him save John the Baptist, see Him save people like me and you, but here's what I want you to see. Here's the Man, the One who will save us from our sins. The Son of God, the Son of Man comes to save us. Joseph, don't worry about embarrassment for Jesus is going to take it all for you at the cross. Don't worry about condemnation. Jesus is going to remove it all at the cross. Don't worry about the charges of gossipers and slanders. Jesus is

going to eradicate all your charges at the cross. Here's the Man, the Savior, not a man The Man, our Redeemer, the one Mediator between God and man, Christ Jesus. Put your trust in Him, but then bring Him to others.

Mary brought Jesus to Elizabeth and John the Baptist is converted. Joseph was used of God to bring Jesus to save us from our sins. Now let's bring Jesus to others that they can be brought to Him. Mary did it. Joseph did it. The same Spirit who dwells in them, dwells in us. May God allow us to do it and be done with the lesser things. Our hearts belong to Christ the King. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for these moments together in Your Word. I pray that You would teach us. Spend a few moments in silent prayer. Put your trust in Him today. Thank You Jesus for Your free gift of salvation. Help us fulfill the calling you have placed upon our lives, so that others may come to know You, I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.