

Written Copy: Matthew 1:20-24 “A Visit from Joseph”

4th Sunday in Advent

Sunday, December 18th, 2022

Text: Matthew 1:20-24

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 text's intent

To show how the Lord works in powerful and miraculous ways that are beyond our understanding to fulfill His promise to send a Messiah who would be born of a virgin. Joseph is betrothed to Mary, a legally binding agreement that is for all intents and purposes marriage without consummation. Joseph knows the child is not his, and therefore decides to do the righteous thing of issuing a written certificate of divorce. But at the same time, he also resolves to do the sacrificially loving thing by not exposing her unfaithfulness and therefore bringing shame or punishment upon her. In the eyes of the public, he would be seen as the cad. But before he can make any of this happen an angel of the Lord comes to him in a dream to make him understand the plan and will of the Lord that he cannot see for himself. Mary has not been unfaithful, so he can take her to be his wife. The child in her womb has been conceived through the powerful working of the Holy Spirit. His name reveals His identity, purpose, and mission: He is to be named Jesus-Yahweh Saves, for He will save His people from their sins. Moreover He is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy of the virgin giving birth to Immanuel: God with us, which was the sign that the LORD would indeed fulfill His promise to save His people from their enemies. When Joseph awakes he is resolved to obediently act according to the LORD's revealed will and take Mary as his wife, in effect becoming Jesus' legal guardian, and making Him according to Jewish Law of the line of David, but not consummating the marriage until after His birth.

Focus Statement:

The LORD sent an angel to Joseph to reveal that Mary's pregnancy was not a sinful mistake, but was the fulfillment of the Messianic promise. This was the miraculous way the LORD was sending the promised Messiah who is of human origin, as the child of Mary, but is also divine as conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. His name describes the purpose and mission: He is Jesus; Yahweh Saves, who will save His people from their sins. He is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy of Immanuel: God with us, who was God's assuring sign that He would save His people from enemies too powerful for them

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

What sometimes seems right in our eyes may not be what the LORD knows to be right according to His will. He must reveal His will to us in His Word. We are called by faith to trust and act on it even when the immediate result is hard on us, or to our detriment.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Gain appreciation for the righteous character of Joseph. Be willing to trust in the promises of God. Be ready to sacrificially love others in obedience to His revealed will, which sometimes means sacrifice for us now. But in that revelation in Scripture comes His presence with the faith to help us through. And the end result is our salvation and eternal life.

Subject Sentence: God with Us: Now and for Eternity

Introduction

Greetings! Shalom! It is so good to be with you here this morning. My, you have some interesting tools here. I could have used things like this in my life. When I was alive, I used to be a carpenter. (*Show hammer*) So, a hammer like this would've been useful. But one like this (*show sledgehammer*) also would've been very, very useful. You see, in my day, carpenters not only worked with wood, but with stone too.

But I didn't come here to talk about my vocation as a carpenter. Instead I want to talk to you about my vocation as a father-an adoptive father-the guardian to the son I adopted as my own, according to the will and work of the Heavenly Father. It was not what I had been planning on, and it wasn't what I had decided to do. It's what the LORD commanded of me. What He has in mind for us as His children isn't always easy. It can in fact be quite hard. But His will brings about the best for all concerned, including me, and you too. By the way, in case you haven't figured it out, my name is Joseph of Nazareth.

The Betrothal and Joseph's Plan to Divorce

I was betrothed to a young virgin maid named Mary, who was from my hometown of Nazareth. She was beautiful, and I was in love with her for quite some time. And I knew she felt the same about me. I would often find a reason to walk past her house, especially when she would be outside doing chores. And I noticed she would find a reason to walk past me when I was working on building something in town. And we often shared those knowing gazes with one another. When her eyes met mine, I could feel a certain tingle shoot through me, and my heart felt warm, and I guess my face blushed.

Eventually I got up the nerve to ask for her hand in marriage. Well, actually my parents asked her parents, who then talked with her. It was then the she and I met, standing face to face, with her parents, my parents, and friends of the family present. We promised ourselves to one another in marriage and agreed to be faithful to one another, including the time period the betrothal was in effect, which usually lasted around 10 months to a year. During this time, we were more than promised to each other, we were considered to be, for all intents and purposes, married. The betrothal was the time when I, as the groom, was to be busy making a home for us to live in. That's where my vocation as a carpenter helped a lot. And she prepared for life as my wife. But during this time, we were to remain celibate. We weren't even allowed to speak with one another, nor was I allowed to visit her. All communication was done between my best man and her maid of honor.

And things were going fine, up until she left Nazareth for the hill country to visit her relative Elizabeth, who had been barren, yet had miraculously become pregnant in her old age. I didn't think too much of this at the time. I loved her and I trusted her. Plus, I figured she could be a great source of help and strength to Elizabeth at this time. It was when she returned that the trouble began. I was informed that she returned with a bump: that she was pregnant.

Hurt by her betrayal. Had a right to public denunciation-town would know not me:

I didn't know what happened or when. All I can tell you is that I was devastated. I felt hurt and betrayed. I have always tried to live by the commands of my LORD God as laid out in the Scriptures. Now, I'm not perfect. So, when I do sin, I seek His forgiveness through His promised grace in the sacrificial system. But I made sure to keep my end of my promise to remain faithful to her. I know the Laws of Moses stand against a righteous man marrying a woman who is no longer a virgin. And I knew I was not the father of that baby she was carrying. I had every right to denounce her unfaithfulness publicly and thereby annul our betrothal in divorce. If I did that, I would get back the dowry I had paid her parents, plus compensation from them for my trouble. I could hold my head up high in town, not being looked at or accused of impropriety regarding the rules of betrothal.

But even though she had broken my heart, I still loved her very much. If I was to publicly denounce her then her reputation would be ruined. She could even have been put to death according to the Laws of Moses. At the very least she and her family would be looked down upon and be outcasts in Nazareth. Even though I was hurt and angry, I couldn't bring myself to do that to her.

So, after giving it thoughtful consideration, I had decided to divorce her quietly. That involved submitting a written notice of divorce to her parents and the witnesses of our betrothal that simply stated I wanted an annulment. It used to be a long time ago I would've been required to give a reason, to state why I was now unhappy and no longer satisfied with her as my wife. But since the Romans had taken over Palestine many of those laws had become lax. I could just state I was no longer happy with her as my wife and leave it at that

This would've done a couple of things. For me, it would place the blame for her bump on my shoulders in the public's eye. They would assume I was the one that got her pregnant, but was covering over my misdeed by divorcing her. I would be seen as the cad. I would probably have to relocate my carpenter's shop to another city. But for my beloved Mary, it would take all suspicions off of her as being an adulteress. She would be seen as a victim at my hands. She and her family could go on living in town. And perhaps, sometime in the future, she could be married.

The Angel's Appearance and Message to Joseph

I remember the night I had resolved to do this. I hadn't been sleeping well. But I was sure that I would sleep better that night. During the night an angel of the Lord came to me in a vision and spoke to me. It wasn't a dream. It was more than a dream. It wasn't a product of my imagination. It was real. An angel of the Lord came to me with a message from the LORD Himself. He addressed me as Joseph, son of David. Now my father's name was actually Jacob. So, this calling me "son of David" tipped me off that this had to do with me being a descendant in the line of David. That's because this message had to do with the fulfillment of the promised Messiah in the line of David.

The angel told me not to be afraid to take Mary as my wife; that doing so would not be breaking the commandments and living unrighteous before the Lord. That's because the father of that child in her womb was not any earthly man. She had conceived that child by the powerful working of the Holy Spirit Himself. Now, how's that for a shocker? How's that for something totally unbelievable? But the angel had more fantastic news for me. That child would be a boy; a boy I was to name "Jesus". Jesus is the Greek rendering of the Hebrew name Joshua, or more accurately "Yeshuah": which means Yahweh is salvation. I was to name Him this because He Himself would save His people from their sins.

But there was more. All this was happening to fulfill the Messianic promise given by the prophet Isaiah in the days of wicked king Ahaz. Ahaz sinfully refused the LORD'S offer to name a sign, and to make it as difficult as he could think of, so the LORD could assure him of His promise of salvation from evil kings, the LORD provided one anyway. The sign was that the virgin would conceive and bear a son, who would be called Immanuel, which means God with Us. So, God with us was the sign that the LORD Himself would fight for and rescue His sinful selfish people who had turned away from Him. And that is exactly what Jesus was sent to do.

Who Jesus Is To Us and What He Did For Us

This adoptive son of mine is God with us in the flesh! He was born of Mary, so He is a human being, But His father was the Holy Spirit. In a way I'm still not sure I understand He is part of the Godhead. He is the Son of God, who went on to call Himself The Son of Man. He is God Himself present among us who came to save His people from their sins.

Now even if that angel had laid out for me exactly how my boy was going to accomplish that I still don't think I would've gotten it. After all, how can anyone's death save me? Yet that same God, who through His word spoken by an angel enlightened me as to who this child is, has enlightened you too, His precious children, as to how that child grew to be our Savior. He grew to be God with us, living among His followers, showing Himself to be "God with us" in all that He said and did. He was "God with us" when He allowed Himself to be nailed to a cross, where He took upon Himself all the sins you and I have committed. He was "God with us" when He gave up His Spirit, having accomplished all that was necessary to forgive your sins. And in His resurrection, He is "God with us", which the Apostle Paul speaking by that same Spirit, said that declared Him, proved Him to be the Son of God in power. And all of you who believe these promises of God by faith will join with Him in the resurrection of all flesh. And there He will be "God with us", and we with Him forever.

Living Out God's Will and Plan Isn't Easy

After the angel in my vision went away, I woke up. I thought long and hard about what he had told me, and what it all meant. I knew what was required of me wouldn't be easy, and it wasn't. I'd like to tell you that I never had any doubts or misgivings about it, but that would be a lie. I'd like to tell you that I had complete understanding of who my boy was and what He had come to do, but at that time I didn't. Life wasn't easy for Mary or me. I didn't wait until the betrothal period was over before I took her to be my wife. It wasn't easy hearing the comments from our neighbors in Nazareth, after all it's not that big a town. But eventually those died down. And it wasn't like what they suspected us of never happened before. Boys will be boys and girls will be girls. It just wasn't as socially accepted in my day as it is in yours now. And it was hard for me, being someone who desired to live an outwardly righteous life, to be seen and thought of as someone who broke the commandment on adultery.

I learned that following God's will isn't always easy. And the things He wants us to do don't always make sense to us. These things can make life seem a lot harder than it should be. I learned the problem is not with God, but with me. I couldn't see the whole picture, just like you may not be able to from where you are in your life right now. But I learned something that I would like to share with you before I go and that is this: trust in God's will, His way, and His plan for you. He does have a plan. And that plan may not always be for your good right at the moment. But the end result will be glorious. What was not easy for me turned out to be a blessing for the whole world. Through His birth, the way it came about, Jesus was declared to be the promised Messiah, the Christ who saves the world from sin. He died to forgive all the doubts and mistakes I made as a father. He died to forgive all yours. And all that God had brought about in my life, and all He brings about in yours, serves His purpose that those He calls to faith be found in steadfast faith when they leave this earth. That includes you, me, and your neighbor. What He allows to happen with you can serve to bring your neighbor to faith, or keep him in steadfast faith to life everlasting.

Conclusion: Joseph Says Goodbye

Thank you for letting me come and visit. I pray that your upcoming celebrations of my adoptive son's birth go well. But even if they don't, because life doesn't always go the way we want it to, remember who that boy is: "God with us". He was "God with us" then. He is "God with us" now. That same Holy Spirit that came and overshadowed Mary and made her with child, that same Spirit who came to me and granted me the faith to believe in the angels promises and live them out, that helped me during the times of doubt, that same Spirit is "God with you" too. He is at work in your heart and your mind to show you that Jesus: "God with us", forgives you all of your sins. And He is at work to keep you focused on Him so that when you leave this world, like me, your soul will go to be with Him in heaven. And on the Last Day, you will stand with me, and Mary, and the Apostle Paul and with all those who died in faith as we enter into life everlasting. Until then: Shalom!! And, thank you for these great tools!