

Sermon for Advent Midweek Service II

Date: December 12, 2018

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Isaiah 7:10–14

Epistle Reading: 2 Peter 3:10–13

Gospel Reading: Matthew 1:18–25

Sermon Text: Matthew 1:18–25

Sermon Title: God Honors the Humble



*Joseph and Baby Jesus
by Guido Reni, 1635*

Introit: Psalm 24:1,3-5

Hymns:

LSB 336 – Lo! He Comes with Clouds Descending

LSB 334 – O Lord, How Shall I Meet You

LSB 935 – Tell Out My Soul, the Greatness of the Lord

LSB 352 – Let the Earth Now Praise the Lord (v.1,4)

LSB 357 – O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Liturgy:

Divine Service: Special



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Text: Matthew 1:18–25

The birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. His mother Mary had been promised to Joseph in marriage, but before they were married Mary was found to be pregnant, by the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph was an honorable man and did not want to disgrace her publicly. So he decided to break the marriage agreement with her secretly.

Joseph had this in mind when an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. The angel said to him, “Joseph, descendant of David, don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife. She is pregnant by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus [which means: He Saves], because he will save his people from their sins.” All this happened so that what the Lord had spoken through the prophet came true: “The virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Emmanuel,” which means “God is with us.”

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him to do. He took Mary to be his wife. He did not have marital relations with her before she gave birth to a son. Joseph named the child Jesus.

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Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We don't really know much about Joseph. We know that he may have been born and raised in Bethlehem. We also know that he was a descendant of King David.¹ Though a very distant relative, and had no inheritance to the throne or any of the royal wealth. We know that because we know he was very, very, poor. We also know that he was a carpenter.² Which in those days could mean a worker in wood or stone, or both. We don't really know much beyond that, but if we look at the culture of his time, and make some educated guesses, and use a little imagination we might be able to catch a glimpse of what he might have been like.

Joseph was a humble man. He was not the sort to be bold or to enjoy the center of attention. He was a good kid in school, getting good average grades. He respected his father and learned the family business from him, as was the way of folks at that time. He was a nice guy but never really stood out in the crowd. Well except for that one time when he was in high school and he saw some boys picking on a little girl named Mary. He mustered some courage that time and chased off the hoodlums.

That was the day he first met her. That was years ago. Mary had since grown up to be a very lovely young woman. Her father always thought highly of Joseph and when the time came to arrange a groom for Mary her father went to Joseph's father first. Though secretly, it was always supposed to be a secret. The fathers agreed and the announcement was made in the market place. In one year Joseph would be wed to young Mary. Neither family had any money but it was a good match, and both Mary and Joseph were happy.



Life was going along quite well for Joseph. An average man living an average life. He, like so many other men of his time, lived, worked, and died, and no one ever took notice of them. They appeared and then disappeared into the annals of time. Joseph always assumed his life would be no different than thousands of others. Little did he know that was all about to change. This humble man was about to be put on display for all the world to see.

...but we're getting ahead of ourselves.

The engagement had been made and Joseph had to start working a little harder to save up his money. Caring for his wife would be more responsibility. There would be no more bowling nights at the local inn with the guys. He had to be responsible now, and save every cent. Life under Herod's taxes was hard enough as a single man. Now he would have to care for Mary as well.

An average man living an average life. Ho hum, drum, drum, his life went on. Then it all started to unwind, like a kitten playing with a ball of string called "his life." He was so certain that Mary was a good girl. She was always so stable and supportive. She appeared so happy about the upcoming wedding. It just never ever crossed his mind that she would be carousing around at night with a rougher crowd.

1 Matthew 1:6,16

2 Matthew 13:55

She had told her parents that she was pregnant. They were shocked and humiliated. What would they tell Joseph and his family? Bethlehem was such a small town. Everyone would know soon enough. They had to do the honorable thing and tell Joseph's family first before the gossip vine got the word to them.

But how? What words could they use after all the celebration over the engagement? Mary tried to tell them some crazed story about God talking to her. She was so insistent that her father nearly blew a gasket. "What has gotten into you that you would tell such lies? Is it not bad enough that you have brought shame on my house and put your own life in danger? Will you make it worse by blaspheming God as well?!"

Mary just stared at the floor crying. She had always been a good, obedient, and very honest girl. She was certain her parents would believe her. That's why she went to them first. (You see God really had spoken to her. She really was the one chosen to bear the Messiah. The baby really was the Son of God.)

The next morning Mary's father got up and waited on the porch. Joseph always walked past their house on the way to his shop, and since phones hadn't been invented yet it would be the best way to catch him before the rumor mill did. The conversation was deeply embarrassing to Mary's father. Joseph barely spoke. He had no idea what to say. This was all too much for his average life. The conversation ended with Mary's father simply saying, "I'm sorry."

Without even thinking Joseph turned back up the street and walked home. His heart was broken, his spirit crushed. "How could I be such a bad judge of character? I really thought she was a godly woman" he said, almost out loud, as he walked slowly home.

It was the next day when he had to go back to Mary's house. There were legal issues to deal with. That and no matter how much his heart was broken, he couldn't accuse Mary of well you know... "I just want to break off the engagement quietly³" he said to her parents. Maybe she can go off and visit some of your relatives for a while or something."

What could her parents say? They loved their daughter. This was all just too much. ...but it had only just begun.

Joseph went right to bed after a long day's work. He was exhausted physically from the work and mentally from his mind reeling all day over the thoughts and the disappointment. He would have slept right through the night but he was awoken in his bedroom by a voice. You could almost call it a man's voice but it was different somehow. Clearer, stronger, a voice that almost seemed to sing every word.

Joseph, descendant of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. She is pregnant by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a Son, and you will name him Jesus,⁴ because He will save his people from their sins...⁵

The angel spoke, and then left him there in the dark again.

3 Matthew 1:19

4 'Jesus' is an Aramaic word that means: 'He Saves'

5 Mathew 1:20

“Oh what have I done?” Joseph said out loud. “Could this vision be true? It must be true! Oh what am I going to do? My parents and hers are never going to believe that God spoke to me. This is all too much excitement.” He never did get back to sleep that night.

In the morning he brought the two families together. He told them, “Last night an angel came to me. He told me that I should not be concerned about Mary because she is going to give birth to the Son of God.”

At first both fathers looked at each other like they knew what was really going through the mind of a young man, impatient, the desires. ...but as the conversation went on everyone realized that Mary and Joseph never really had time to make up this story together. “...well perhaps ...just maybe? ...could it really be...? I mean it’s just not possible. Do you mean to say that our little Mary...? The Son of God?! Could our little Mary be so honored a woman to be chosen to bear the Messiah?”

It was Mary’s father who spoke the first complete sentence. “We are both descendants of David, just like the prophecies tell us.⁶ The priests teach us that every year. Oh my, what in the world are we going to tell the priests?”

The truth is as quiet, average, peaceful, and poor, as Joseph was God had much greater plans for him. Joseph’s life was going to become something far far more than just average. Over the next two years he would have to travel to Bethlehem. Then his house would be visited by a great caravan with wise men who knew, without being told, who Jesus really was. Then another angel with a warning, and just a few hours to pack up a whole house and travel off to Egypt.⁷

A few years later, traveling back to Nazareth. Always starting over, again, and again. Just getting his shop and his regular customers, and off he goes again on yet another exciting trip.



Joseph was just an average man, but God had great plans for him. You see Joseph was humble. He honored God and respected his parents but he was not weak. He learned that himself when he found the courage to step up and defend Mary at school so many years ago.

Joseph was a humble man but as Jesus would later teach, “The last will be first and the first will be last.”⁸ Joseph was a man, a strong man, a good man, a man used by God to do great things of high honor.

Joseph was a humble man who now enjoys the preparations being made for the Christmas celebration going on right now in heaven.

It must be so exciting.

Amen.

6 2 Samuel 7:16

7 Matthew 2:13

8 Matthew 20:16



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