

Sermon December 21, 2025

Matthew 1:18-25

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do 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 as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

"Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means, "God is with us."

When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son, and he named him Jesus.

Visions and Dreams

Nativity scene. Missing Joseph

Random townsman.

But Joseph is not random townsman. Little Meg understood something fundamental all those years ago – there can be no Christmas story... no Easter story... and nothing in between... without Joseph.

Joseph is the man that God chose to raise God's own son. Joseph must have been a special man and we should take some time to remember him, lift him up and honor him.

In the aftermath of that dramatic moment when the angel Gabriel visited Mary, she must have been worried that she would lose Joseph. He surely would never believe her crazy story. In fact, we are told that he planned to

quietly walk away and end their engagement. But, God of course, had other plans for Joseph – plans beyond his wildest dreams... until he came face to face with God's wildest dreams...

Today he has own chance to come face to face with God's heavenly sent angel. In his dreaming, he hears some of the very words that Mary heard in her waking: "Do not be afraid," the angel tells him. "God needs you! God has amazing plans for you!"

Joseph, against reason or cultural expectations, chooses not to send away his pregnant fiancé but rather to cast his lot with her and with the child she will bear. He devotes the rest of his life to raise and love a child he names Jesus.

Joseph and Mary both bear witness to the God who re-orders and disturbs the world—the God who seeks to do remarkable things through God's people. Through us.

Joseph listened for God's word, and he tried to follow it. And when God spoke to Joseph in a dream, Joseph got up and did all that God commanded. He married Mary. He got them safely to Bethlehem. He named the child Jesus. He took them to safety in Egypt in the dark of night... refugees in a strange land. He changed his entire life-plans... over and over again... all for the One who called to him in a dream. Through his faithful response, God was working out God's plan for the salvation of the whole world.

What could be more amazing than that!?!

By not walking away – by living into God's expectations, Joseph did a astonishing thing. God was able to do wonderful things for all of us because of the actions of a faithful man who pinned his hope and dreams on God.

Joseph, the one who taught Jesus to be a carpenter in a small town, taught him so much more.

Joseph raised Jesus in a faith grounded on love of God and neighbor... to recognize God as more than a distant figure in the heavens, but as one who

will pierce through dreams and bring visions of a new way of living. God, Abba, Daddy.

Joseph taught Jesus that loving a neighbor means that you stop and stay with the lost and the lonely... that you go into the darkest and most broken parts of our world because that is where God needs us most

Joseph showed Jesus what is right and wrong, good and bad, just and unjust.

Joseph was Jesus' father in every sense of the word because he raised him to be the man that God meant him to be.

Joseph was exactly the father God called him to be to raise Jesus to be the Christ we needed him to be.

Mary was not the only one who chose to leave the life she had thought would be hers. In choosing Mary and her child, Joseph accepted a life that was not the one he imagined. By welcoming the Word into his life, Joseph had his own threshold to cross, his own radical yes to say to God. Perhaps on the night of Jesus' birth, lost to us through time, Joseph lifted up a father's Magnificat in words lost to us; perhaps, in a shelter far from home, he wove them into a lullaby for his chosen child. And as he looked at the sleeping face of this newborn baby, I am sure he promised to do all that he could to live up to God's expectations and to raise this little boy as his very own.

One day, over 2000 years ago, God chose two special people to parent God's own child. They chose to accept the challenge, knowing that God truly was with them. God continues to be with us today...Emmanuel... God with us. What is God asking us to do today? What has God chosen you for? What are you choosing this day? Awake or in your dreams, how are you listening for and responding to the messages and the invitations that are waiting for you? In a few days we will gather here again to celebrate the birth of Joseph's adopted son, Jesus. Awake and asleep, may God strengthen you to follow love's call with joy. Amen.