

West Valley Church
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Born the King Part Four *Matthew 1:18-25*

I'm sure you are aware that we have several generations of families with us that are Latino, and while their children and teens speak English, their parents and grandparents do not speak it as well (it's not an easy thing to learn a new language at our age or older!). And we worship together each week. It is important for the rest of us to know that their heart language is still Spanish, and we honor that, and we want to say to our Latino families, "Thank you for worshiping with us! Thank you for being a part of the family of God here at West Valley Church. We are grateful you are with us, and we would not be a complete family without you! So that introduction video we just watched was in Spanish – is just a simple way to say thank you for being with us. We need you!" We might come from different cultures, and we might even speak different languages, but we are *one* family, *one* citizenship in the Kingdom of God, because Jesus Christ came to this earth to seek and save *all* of us! The Bible tells us, "For Christ himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility..." (Ephesians 2:14). When Christ was born, the angels announced, "Peace on earth, goodwill to humankind." We intend to be an example of the peace that Christ brought with his birth!

This is our last Sunday before Christmas Day, so I want us to look briefly at a part of the Christmas story leading up to Jesus' birth, and it's in Matthew chapter one. Would you honor God's Word by standing with me as I read it to us?

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered 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 home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus. (Matthew 1:18-25, niv)

May God bless his Word to our hearts - you can be seated.

That passage doesn't tell us exactly *how* Joseph found out about Mary's pregnancy. We don't know if he was told by a tear-filled, anxiety-ridden Mary. We don't know if it was a friend who heard from a friend who heard from Elizabeth. Or it could have been that, after returning from her visit with Elizabeth, Mary was no longer able to hide the signs of growing life – she was now showing and couldn't hide it. However Joseph found out, it had to feel like a punch to the gut.

You need to know that being engaged in that culture and time wasn't like a modern-day engagement; today, if an engagement is called off, all you need to do is return a ring and cancel your wedding plans. Back then, engagement was just as legally binding as our marriages are today. To break off an engagement required a certificate of divorce – Joseph and Mary's commitment was already deep. But then – everything changed.

Mary could explain as many times as she wanted that this child wasn't another man's, but who would believe that? Joseph may have been a righteous man, but he wasn't delusional. He knew how babies were made, and even in the stories he heard growing up of God intervening to grant children to the prophets of old, they still involved a man and a woman. Joseph must've thought that Mary had obviously had an affair—or maybe she had been abused. The whole spectrum of emotions and explanations probably swirled into his mind.

He could have her brought to trial to decide if she was a victim, a participant in prostitution, or had had an affair. He could have her brought out of her home, where she most likely lived with her parents, to be stoned to death in front of the entire community. These actions would have been within his rights, and nobody would've blamed him. That was what people did in those days for such crimes against the law of God.

You probably noticed that Matthew's is not like Luke's birth narrative. There are no angels singing in the sky to peaceful shepherds in a field. No halos sitting over Mary's head. This is not the sanitized nativity scene we see displayed all over at this time of year. *This is messy, chaotic, awkward, and hard.* This is real life, and it involves difficult decisions, destroyed reputations, rumors, and hardship. Jesus did not come into a sanitized nativity scene. No – Jesus came into this very messy, chaotic, awkward, hard world—through ordinary people called to extraordinary things. So the first thing we need to see in this Scripture for today is that...

1. In the midst of life, Joseph *showed up* for *God*.

Imagine being Joseph. It doesn't matter what Mary says—it would still be difficult to believe. I imagine that the feelings of betrayal would be hard to see through. You would go through all your options, but most of us wouldn't land where Joseph did.

To help you understand the culture at that time, it might be good to know that at the very least, this marriage was contractual between Mary's family and Joseph. He would have promised an amount of money for her—which, if he could prove she had been unfaithful or had been a victim of some man, he would no longer have to pay.

Joseph's reputation could also be saved and his side of the contract upheld if he took her to trial and found out about some sort of infidelity on her part.

Despite this being a contractual relationship and an unbelievable situation, Joseph chooses the path least damaging—not to himself, but to Mary: and that was to divorce her. A quiet divorce would not necessarily prevent rumors. There's a chance people would always believe they had broken a vow to not sleep together until the marriage was complete. A quiet divorce would, however, possibly give Mary a chance; she might be able to just return to her parents' home (if they'd take her back). While she would still have a difficult life ahead, she would *be* alive, versus a stoning or a lengthy, public, shameful trial that could still end in death for her.

But Joseph's act of mercy shows us that, even though he is a man committed to Jewish law, he is also a person of mercy. He clearly has love for Mary. Whether his feelings toward her are romantic isn't clear, but what is clear is that he cares enough about her to seek mercy. Joseph is described as a "righteous man." "Righteous" is often described as doing the right things for the right reasons, and this defines Joseph. Despite the pain, he wanted to do what was right for those involved.

And then...

2. In the midst of the mess, an *angel* of *God* showed up.

The passage that we read says that an angel came to Joseph in a dream when he had resolved to divorce her—when the decision had been made in his mind.

This couldn't have been an easy decision, and again, the decision he made shows his righteousness. But then the angel appeared to him, and Joseph wakes up and doesn't hesitate to do what was asked of him. This was not a small thing to follow through with, even after the dream. Joseph knew what this would mean. *There would be rumors*. The righteous Mary and Joseph would be viewed as less than righteous by certain people.

Reputations would change. Joseph would claim this child—who is not his—as his own. While Joseph knew some of the immediate consequences of claiming this child as his, he had no idea what would await him.

Having any child is a life-changing experience, right? I remember when our first was born, I wondered if we would ever sleep for a full night again in our lives. I would usually get up in the night to get the boys, to change them, and to bring them to their mother, but I have to tell you, I would fall asleep thanking God that Shelly was the feeder and not me! She had to stay awake until it was all done. And then, just to be sure we'd never sleep for years, we had two more kids. But it's not just sleep changes, right? *Everything* in your life changes. Now imagine how you would prepare for a baby that is the Son of God?!

When we had our babies, there was a book that was a life-saver – it was called, "What to Expect When You are Expecting." We probably went through several of those books. What Chilton's and Clymer's is to cars, that book is to babies! (Those of you who work on your own cars know what I'm talking about). But you won't find anywhere, in any bookstore or on Amazon, there is no book on what to expect when you're expecting the son of God.

Joseph's commitment to the call of God to parent this child was an adventure into unknown places. Still, Joseph also would have grown up with the Hebrew scriptures, what the prophets had said, and he would have known this road would not be easy. The call of God on his life was stronger than Joseph's desire to run away from the situation. And because God sent the angel, that helped Joseph immensely.

Joseph desired to follow God, even if that meant running right into the mess. All of his previous plans for his life with Mary have suddenly changed, yet he still chooses to follow. But thankfully, God wasn't content to only send an angel in his place.

3. In the midst of the mess, *God* showed up.

Joseph is told to name the child Jesus, which means "Yahweh saves." The name "Jesus" fulfills the promise that God has heard the cries of his people. Jesus will save the people from their sins.

The naming of a child in their culture illustrates Joseph claiming Jesus as his own child. Claiming a child as your own—regardless of parentage—was just as binding as if they were your biological child. This was an adoption without distinction. From that point forward, he was Joseph's child. And yet, the name also indicates that the origins of this child are from God.

There is another name for Jesus given in this text: "Immanuel." It means, "God with us." God is entering the world, to be present with humanity in the mess.

This was a difficult period of history for the Jews, when God showed up. The oppressive Romans were in power. The Jews were taxed astronomically. Soldiers walked the streets, doing what they wanted, when they wanted, to any Jew they wanted. Jews couldn't build or travel without permission from the government.

Not only was it difficult politically; it was generally a hard time to live. One of the most common causes of death for women was childbirth. Simple injuries could cause infection and death. Poverty was rampant. Survival was dependent on back-breaking work.

Jesus comes into this difficult and messy world. God comes into the mess. And this is Good News, because...

4. The world is *still a messy* place.

While some of us live comfortably, not all do. Even in America, children go to bed hungry. Drugs are still a source of addiction. The refugee crisis seems to keep getting worse. There is war. There is poverty.

We know that even in our own lives things are messy. There are diagnoses no one wanted. Death still happens, and sometimes at the worst times. We are busy, and life is hard. There is so much in our world that is hard. Thankfully...

5. God is still *God-with-us* in the midst of the mess.

Advent is about our anticipation of Christ's birth and his return, but it also is a time for us to look for where God is at work *now* in our world.

We sometimes can't see the work of God in our world because we are so focused on the bad, but God is still *God-with-us*:

- In beautiful moments.
- When people share with each other and those in need.
- When people are generous.
- When people choose the hard work of peace over conflict.
- When people set aside racial or cultural differences and give honor and preference to each other.

One of the ways God wants to be present in the world is *through us*. Just like God used Joseph, God wants to use us.

So...

6. In the midst of *your* life, *show up* for God.

We won't be the actual parents of the Son of God, but we are able to follow the call of Christ despite what that means. Like Joseph, we can focus on mercy over the law. We can offer people grace instead of judgment, even if we think they deserve it. We can focus on love and obedience over what that means for our reputation. We can embrace the mess of our lives and still trust that God shows up and wants to use us. Let's show up for God.

Joseph was just an ordinary man trying to follow God to the best of his ability, and it led him on a wild and messy adventure of raising the Messiah. But the God who called Joseph on this wild adventure is still in the business of calling us to wild and messy adventures that reveal *God-with-us* in the world.

This is a great time for us to look for where God is at work and to ask what God is calling us to do in the midst of it all. You probably won't get an angel dream, but you might get a dream in your heart that just won't go away. It might be a hard dream: a dream that asks you to forgive, or to give up propriety for the sake of love, or to do other hard things. It won't be easy, as I'm sure it wasn't easy for Joseph, but you'll also get to be a part of this great story of the work that God is continuing to do in the world, and you'll get to remind people that God is with us, even in the mess.

Pray