



Sunday, December 17, 2023

Speaker: Pastor John VanderWindt

Scripture: Matthew 1:18-25

Sermon Title: Hope and Faith

Joseph felt a hope from God and yet, in a circumstance which he couldn't explain, he dealt with it. So today we saw the story of Christmas. In a story which we saw today is the one which we read about in Luke 2 with the shepherds. In Matthew 2, with the wisemen. But today, we're going to look at a little bit before this story. The story of Joseph, someone who is usually not spoken of during the Christmas story. We all hear about Mary. We all hear about the shepherds. We hear about the wisemen and the angels. But where was Joseph? And today we're going to look at the story of Joseph.

I invite you to turn with me to Matthew 1. We're going to begin reading at verse 18. Here we have the story of a man whom we hear very little about. But yet there are a couple of things within this person which should lead us to thinking about how we do life and how does our faith give us hope in spite of what the circumstances are around us. So please join me as I read from Matthew 1, beginning at verse 18.

18 This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about^[a]: 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. **19** Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet^[b] did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

20 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. **21** She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,^[c] because he will save his people from their sins."

22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: **23** "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"^[d] (which means "God with us").

24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. **25** But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

This is the Word of the Lord. Let's pray Dear Lord, we thank You for Your Word. We thank You, Lord, for people like Joseph, of whom we hear very little. But yet, Lord, his faith is so strong. Lord, we pray that as you speak this morning, that these may be words from You and not from me, that You will open our ears and our hearts that we may hear You. And, Lord, that you will grant us Your peace and Your hope, and that You will increase our faith no matter where we are. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Joseph, as was portrayed here just a minute ago, was said to be pledged to be married to Mary. They had their date set. The plans were there. Now we have to understand that to be pledged to be married - or a word which was used before was "betrothed." Betrothed was different than what we see today as an engagement. Today, couples get engaged and we get excited and they plan for their wedding. But an engagement is kind of a, "Well, we are going to get married. But there's nothing really in place yet so if we decide to break it off during the engagement... well, we broke it off and that's okay. A betrothal was much different. A betrothal was an act of a contract in which the two of them had already promised to be together. In fact, many times they would still be referred to as husband and wife, even though they were not yet married.

So, for Mary to be pregnant and for Joseph to find out, this is as if they were married. And she became pregnant. And so for Joseph to say, "I have every right to divorce her," that aspect is very true according to the law. So here we have Joseph being willing to go and say, "I could go to the witness stand with the prosecutor and say, 'She is pregnant; therefore, she committed adultery. Therefore, I would like this marriage or this betrothal to be ended.'" That was truth. That's where Joseph could be in that space. But it is interesting that God, in His mercy, gave Joseph an understanding of who Jesus would be.

In **John 1:1**, we read, "**1** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." And that Jesus is God. And in **John 1:14**, it says, "**14** The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." This is who Joseph was. This is what Joseph was practicing. Even before Jesus came, Joseph understood truth. But Joseph also understood God's grace and God's mercy. And Joseph understood that, even in this situation, even though he could demand a court case, "What would God demand? What would God ask for in this case?" Joseph, realizing that he was a sinner, understood that he needed to extend grace to Mary as well. That rather than shame her in this place, it was a matter of, "Yes, truth needs to be proclaimed. But there is grace that needs to be extended."

So Joseph decides to divorce her quietly. You have to understand that there is a lot going on in this small community. This is a very small town. And Joseph understands that everybody in town is going to know. When a person is betrothed, that's usually for about a year. And people are smart. They can do the math. If Mary comes up with a child before the wedding date, it's obvious what happened. And Joseph knows that and just understands that that is going to be part of Mary's life. But it will also be part of his. So Joseph, in extending this grace, is in some way also saying, "Mary, I am going to take this with you. But I'm going to do it in not a public way."

And then the angel appears to Joseph and says, "Joseph, Mary is with child by the Holy Spirit." Maybe you can imagine Joseph's reaction to this. Right? First of all, he's probably thinking, "Yah, Lord? That's not the way science works. I mean, you can't just become pregnant all of a sudden. But there's another piece to it. "Lord, what do you mean by the Holy Spirit?" Right? We live in a time in which we know of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but he's living in a time when it's just God. There is Yahweh.

And in the Old Testament, we sometimes read of the Spirit of the Lord, which is kind of the word of the Lord. It's this aspect of truth which comes down from God to the people. And it would say, "The Lord said through the prophets... " So the Spirit of God would speak through the prophets and now we have the Spirit of God coming to be with us. And as a Spirit of God who is coming to be with Mary so that Mary is going to be expecting a child.

It is interesting, if you go back to Genesis 3. When God meets Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden after they have sinned, He says to the serpent that he will be cursed and then he says that the seed of the woman will come. It is from a woman with whom God will bring redemption to all people.

So Joseph is hearing this and he's thinking about this aspect of God coming. And they're waiting for a Messiah. And he remembers that it's going to be through the seed of the woman who is going to redeem his people. And this aspect of truth, the truth of God which comes from the Spirit is now going to be brought to life. Then Matthew does something interesting, which when you read Matthew, he does quite often. He kind of has this piece where he all of a sudden says, "Oh, by the way, I need to interject something just a moment." And you'll see in **Matthew 1:22-23**, where it says, "**22** All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet. **23** "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel." And here, he is referring back to Isaiah **7:14**, which says, "**14** Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."

Which means, "God with us." Think about that for just a moment. What does it mean that God is with us? Think about that for Joseph a moment. What does it mean that, here in this circumstance which he did not plan for, which he was not expecting, which he did not want, what does it mean when God says to him, "God is with you?"

When Jesus was born, it was the case in which God came to be with us. And in this manger, we had a baby who took on humanity, who took on everything that we experienced except sin. So he knows our hurts. He knows our betrayals. He knows our joys. And he now says, "I am with you." And so here we have it. Joseph is being told that God will be with you. It might be easy to say. But the reality is for Joseph the problem has not gone away. In fact, now Joseph is being brought to the center of it. Now Joseph has been brought to this space in which now he is involved totally. And yet, Joseph does this knowing that everybody in town is going to know that Mary's pregnant before they got married. And this won't last just until Jesus is born. This will last until Jesus starts his ministry.

Now here's the kicker. It's very well possible that Joseph died before Jesus started his ministry. So Joseph lived his whole life knowing that Jesus was the Son of God who had come to be with us, but he never got to experience it the way everybody else did. He never got to see Jesus in his ministry. He didn't get to see the miracles which Jesus performed. He didn't get to see the coming of God fully in Christ as He gave Himself on the cross for us to be saved. Joseph lived in that space in which his hope and his faith was in a God who he knew would complete what God had designed to be completed, even though he did not witness it. He lived through the trials and the difficult times of having to answer the questions from people that came at him. But he remained steadfast in that piece. He remained in that place in which God used him as a person to say, "Yes, I am going to believe that when God says that He is with us, He is with us in all things."

When we did the Advent candle this morning, we read from Hebrews 11:1. It says, "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." This is what Joseph lived out. Joseph lived in that space of hope. He lived in that space of faith, in a God who he could not see the way it ended out. When the angel addressed him, he addressed him, "Joseph, son of David." In the section just before what we read, there is this genealogy of Christ, and in Matthew 1:16, it says, "16 and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah." When the angel called him son of David, he understood his place. At that point, he understood that he was in the royal line. He was part of that royal line that God had said, "I will put a king on the throne forever."

And here's the part. The angel says to Joseph, "Son of David." But the angel says to each of us, "You are now my God's children. You have been adopted into God's family. And so now you remember that you are part of the royal line of God's family." And when you think about the fact that you are part of God's adopted family, you too can say with all confidence, "I have hope that God will fulfill His purposes in my life and in the life for the generations to come after me. And maybe some of God's purposes, I will not see." And man, is that hard. We want to see the fruit of God's work in our lives, and for some of us, we will not see it. But that shouldn't reduce our hope. That should increase our hope because we know that we can't make it happen. It's only God who can make it happen. And we see through Joseph that he knows in this piece that God will make it happen.

A little sidenote... think about this a few years later, when Joseph and Mary and Jesus go to Jerusalem for the first time, and they travel there. They spend a few days there. They go home, and after day one, they're looking for Jesus and they can't find him. Imagine that conversation. "God, I lost your son. Can you help me find him?" But Joseph, even in that space, knew that God was there. He knew that God would have Jesus in his hand. And where did they find him? In his father's house in the temple.

Joseph's hope his entire life was knowing that his son was going to save his people. In fact, that's why he was given the name Jesus. The name Jesus or the Hebrew name Yeshua, means, "God saves." And so as we celebrate next week this Christmas, this time of giving, may we remember God's gift to us. God's gift to us is more than just a child in a manger. But God's gift to us is the Holy Spirit, which comes and dwells with us.

This Christmas, may we remember that the faith we have in Christ, no matter how big or how small, gives us hope. And it gives us hope knowing that God is there. And even if things are not the way we had planned, God will be there and is always there. Emmanuel, God with us.

You could say, "Emmanuel. God with... and then fill in your name. Actually, I'd like to invite you to do that together. Let us say, Emmanuel, God with (say your name.) Amen.

Dear Lord, we thank You that You have come to be with us. And Lord, and that being with us, you increase our hope and remind us of the hope that we have in You. Lord, we pray that even when things are not well, when things are not as we had planned, Lord, we ask that You will give us the faith and the hope to remember that you are with us and Lord, that You will bring it to pass as You have desired, even if we don't see it. Because Lord, You are with us and You are sovereign. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Transcribed by: *Liza Perry*