**December 22, 2019 Matthew 1:18-25**

***BORN the KING: A Fine Mess***

**Scripture:** Matthew 1:18-25 NRSV

(18)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 with child from the Holy Spirit. (19)Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. (20)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. (21)She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." (22)All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: (23)"Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." (24)When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, (25)but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

**Notes:**

1. Joseph ***knows***.
   1. Joseph knew where ***babies*** come from,
   2. Joseph could have Mary brought to ***trial***
   3. Joseph could have Mary brought out of her ***home***,
   4. Jesus did not come into a ***sanitized*** nativity scene.
2. Joseph was a ***righteous*** man.
   1. Joseph chooses the path least damaging to ***Mary***.
   2. Righteous is doing the ***right*** thing for the ***right*** reason.
   3. In the midst of the mess, an ***angel*** ***of*** ***God*** shows up**.**
   4. Joseph doesn’t ***hesitate*** to do what he was asked of him.
3. Joseph’s commitment to God is an ***adventure*** into unknown places.
   1. The call of God on his life was ***stronger*** than Joseph’s desire to flee.
   2. In the midst of the mess, God ***shows*** up.
   3. “Immanuel,” “God with us,” is entering the ***mess***.
4. God is in the business of ***calling*** ***us*** to wild and messy things.
   1. The world is still a ***messy*** place.
   2. God is still ***God****-****with****-****us***in the midst of the mess.
   3. We can be God’s light by being ***obedient*** to God’s will.

**Transcript:**

I am terrible at keeping a secret, but then again should secrets be kept; especially when they are about somebody that you love; when the news you keep hidden could cause you harm or pain; when the news you keep hidden away could cause hurt to somebody you care about? We all have secrets that we keep. We keep them hidden away because we do not want to deal with the fallout of the news. We try to protect our friends, families, the ones we love; especially when the secrets are about us, and could harm our reputation. Well we all have heard dirty little secrets, the dirt on somebody around town; the gossip of who did what with whom, who is getting married, who is getting a divorce, and who is having a baby.

In our text today we find a secret that is being revealed, and with this secret there are consequences and actions; actions that must be taken to protect others, the protection of one’s well being, the protection of one’s reputation, the protection of one who is in our care, the protection of our bodies, and of those who have not even been born yet. Did you hear the news? Joseph found out his fiancé is pregnant. And if he didn’t do; then who did?

Of course there is the finger of blame to be pointed. How could she have done this to poor Joseph. He is such a good man and a hard worker too. What is he going too do? What are his options? That is what is happening here in our passage. Would you turn in your bibles to Matthew 1:18-25, as we share in the reading of our gospel passage today.

(18)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 with child from the Holy Spirit. (19)Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. (20)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. (21)She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." (22)All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: (23)"Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." (24)When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, (25)but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus. Matthew 1:18-25 NRSV

We don’t know how Joseph found out but he ***knows***. The text doesn’t tell us how Joseph found out about Mary’s pregnancy. We don’t know if the news was shared 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. Maybe after returning from her visit with Elizabeth, she was no longer able to hide the signs of growing life. No matter, he found out, it had to feel like a blow.

Betrothal wasn’t like a modern-day engagement, where all you need to do is return a ring and cancel your wedding plans. Betrothal was just as contractual as our marriages are today. It required a certificate of divorce, their commitment was 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 where ***babies*** come from. Even in the stories he heard growing up God intervening to grant children to the prophets of old, they still involved a man and a woman. Mary Must have had an affair or maybe she had been raped. The whole spectrum of emotions and explanations had to swirl around in his mind.

He could have her brought to ***trial***. There they would decide if she was a victim, a participant in prostitution, or had had an affair. In either case she would have most likely been stoned to death.

He could have her brought out of her ***home***, where she most likely lived with her parents, to be stoned in front of the entire community. This would allow him to save face. These actions would have been within his rights, and nobody would’ve blamed him. That was what people did and expected in those days for such crimes against the law of God.

Let’s face it; this is not 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 all over 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. Rather, Jesus came into this very messy, chaotic, awkward, hard world, through ordinary people called to extraordinary things.

So, what shall we learn from this advent season? Joseph was a ***righteous*** man. Imagine being Joseph. It doesn’t matter what Mary says, it would still be difficult to believe. You would go through all your options, but most of us wouldn’t land where Joseph did. It would be easy for him to cry out for justice. We know that people have killed others for far less. The feelings of betrayal would be hard to see through.

This marriage was not necessarily a marriage of love. It most likely was contractual between Mary’s family and Joseph. He would have promised an amount of money for her, which he wouldn’t have to pay if he could prove she had been raped or unfaithful. His 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, he chooses the path least damaging—not to himself but to ***Mary***: divorce. A quiet divorce would not necessarily prevent rumors. There is a chance people would always believe they had broken a vow; the vow to not sleep together until the marriage was complete. A quiet divorce would possibly give Mary a chance at just returning to her parents’ home. While she would still have a difficult life ahead, she would *be* alive, versus a stoning or a lengthy, public, shameful hearing that could still end in death for her.

Joseph’s act of mercy shows us that, 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. “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.

In the midst of the mess, an ***angel*** ***of*** ***God*** shows up**.** The text says that an angel comes to Joseph in a dream after he had resolved to divorce her, when the decision had been made in his mind. This couldn’t have been an easy decision, and the decision he made illustrated his righteousness.

Joseph wakes up and doesn’t ***hesitate*** to do what he 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.; 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, but how do you prepare for the son of God? There is no book “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. Yet he 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 flee. Even after the angel appeared, he could have left, yet he didn’t. Joseph desired to follow God, even if that meant running right into the mess. All of the plans he had made for his life with Mary have suddenly changed, yet he still chooses to follow.

In the midst of the mess, God ***shows*** 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.

There is another name for Jesus given in this text: “Immanuel.” “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. The oppressive Romans were in power. The Jews were taxed astronomically. Soldiers walked the streets, doing what 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 what a fine mess it is. Joseph was just an ordinary man, an ordinary man trying to follow God to the best of his ability. Joseph was led 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. 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.

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 worsening. 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.

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, 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.

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. When people choose the hard work of peace over conflict.

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. 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. We can focus on mercy over the law. 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 wants to use us. We can be a catalyst for change; We can be God’s light to a world full of darkness; All by being what God calls us to be; ***obedient*** to his will and His way.