

Joseph's side of the story: Matthew 1:18-1:25

Disclaimer: Material for this message was adapted in part from sermons found on the Sermon Central website.

The Christmas season is always a special time of year and every family has their own particular traditions:

- decorating the Christmas tree,
- hanging stockings,
- traveling to visit family and friends.
- Many people enjoy driving out to the Elks Home to look at the Christmas displays
- As you drive around the town, you inevitably come across nativity displays set up on front lawns.
- Also, many churches in the area, this year once again including Holy Land USA (on Dickerson Mill Road), will be reenacting the story of Jesus' birth through a living crèche scene .

The cast of characters associated with the story of Jesus' birth is colorful and memorable. We recognize each of them by their **unique speaking parts**.

With dramatic words, **Angels** begin the season. First, the archangel Gabriel visits Mary to make the unforgettable announcement of her pregnancy. Then, another Angel appears to Joseph – in a dream – to explain this birth to him. And on that first Christmas eve, an angelic choir startles a group of sleepy shepherds, with loud singing, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*" (Luke 2:14).

Then there is **Mary**, who having heard of her divine selection, offers a beautiful hymn of thanksgiving, "*My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed.*" (Luke 1:46-48)

Next the **shepherds** become early evangelists! Following the angelic announcement they hurry to find the baby Jesus. "*And when they saw him, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child*" (Luke 2:17).

Then, finally in come the **Magi** diligently seeking the newborn King, so that they might present Him with gifts of honor, saying, "*Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him*" (Matt. 2:2).

Oddly enough, **only Joseph has no speaking part**. He is the lone silent member of the cast, often forgotten, standing in the background, quietly looking at the child, saying nothing.

Angels bring heavenly greetings. Mary sings a solo. Wise men worship. Shepherds preach. But Joseph is silent. No notable lines are attributed to him. No sound bites. No quotes. Only silence. However, Joseph is just as irreplaceable in the story of Jesus' birth as is Mary. Joseph's importance cannot be overstated.

So, please open your Bibles to join with me in reading Matthew 1:18-25 (if you are using a pew Bible, you find this on page 1 in the New Testament). And pay special attention to the role that Joseph plays in bringing about the greatest gift of all time...

¹⁸Now 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. ¹⁹Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly. ²⁰But 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. ²¹She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²²All 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." ²⁴When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, ²⁵but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

It still amazes me, that nowhere in these verses do we hear Joseph's voice. In fact, as we search the Gospels, we discover that they do not contain even a single word uttered from the mouth of Jesus' earthly father. In fact the last time we even hear of Joseph is when their 12-year old son gets left behind at the Temple, and after frantically searching for him, it is Mary who give Jesus the tongue lashing.

But, as people say, **actions often speak much louder than words!**
Through his silent actions, Joseph can still teach us three lessons.

First, is a lesson in RIGHTEOUSNESS:

Let's return to the text. *¹⁸Now 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. ¹⁹Her husband **Joseph, being a righteous man** and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly.*

We first meet Joseph in the middle of a personal crisis. Having become engaged to a beautiful young girl, he has worked hard to establish an income and provide a home for his new bride so that they might begin a family together. He is in love. He is committed to Mary. He thought she loved him, until hearing the news that his precious bride was pregnant.

Heart-broken and feeling betrayed, how should he respond?
Should he publicly shame her?
Should he turn her over to the authorities, possibly to be stoned?

Mary's explanation of her pregnancy was unbelievable, even blasphemous. Even though she might not have been stoned on the charge of adultery, she could be stoned for the charge of blasphemy against God! However, Joseph chooses the path of mercy. He was "***a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace,***" so he resolved to divorce her quietly.

Did you notice that even before any divine explanation is given, Joseph has already chosen mercy. No malice. No explosion. Certainly he could have asked a lot of questions here: "How could you do this to me? Who's the father?" But, no words are recorded, only tenderness.

He would certainly be the talk of Nazareth. Friends will make snide comments, joke about cuckolded husbands. But he would not hurt Mary, no matter what he thought she had done to him. When he could have demanded a bitter sentence, Joseph chose mercy.

Today, there is much we can learn from Joseph's example of righteousness coupled with mercy. Maybe you've never been in a position quite like Joseph's, but we have all been wronged by another person. We all know what it feels like to be hurt or offended. How do you react when you are wronged?

Two friends were walking through the desert and got into an argument. One friend slapped the other on the face. The one who got slapped was hurt, but without saying anything, wrote in the sand: "*Today my best friend slapped me in the face.*"

They kept walking until they found an oasis. Thirsty, they stopped for water. The one who had been slapped fell in and started to drown. But, his friend saved him. That night, he carved on a stone: "*Today my best friend saved my life.*"

The friend who had done the slapping and then the saving, asked him, "*After I hurt you, you wrote in the sand but now you carve on a stone, why?*"
He replied: "*When someone hurts us we should write it in the sand where the winds of forgiveness can erase it away. But, when someone does something good for us, we must engrave it in stone where it will be long remembered.*"

Here is the lesson. If we are truly righteous, then we will do right by others, even when they have done wrong by us.

One of Joseph's other sons would one day grow up to take Jesus' place as head up the Church founded by his big brother. Strange, as it may sound, James as the little brother probably had much to forgive Jesus; imagine him – just a normal kid – growing up in the shadow of the Messiah (the chosen one). In his letter to the Church, James would write, "***the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy.***" (James 3:17).

So, Joseph, this righteous carpenter who would raise God's Son, also raised his other sons & daughters to be righteous and merciful people.

The second lesson we can learn from Joseph is one of... REDEMPTION:

Let's go back once again to the scripture. 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. ²¹She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, **for he will save his people from their sins.**"*

In Joseph's dream, God gave him a glimpse of the divine plan. Because Joseph was a descendant of David and a righteous man, God gave him the unique privilege and obligation in raising the Messiah. God told Joseph, that Mary's Son would, "**save His people from their sins!**" In fact, the name "Jesus" is a transliteration of the Hebrew word "**Yeshua**," meaning "The Salvation of The Lord," or more simply "The Savior."

So from even His name, we learn Jesus' mission on earth was to "*save His people from their sins!*" Jesus came to earth to redeem mankind; to save us from the penalty of our sins. But, in order to **redeem something, a price must always be paid.**

Lou Johnson, nicknamed "Sweet Lou," died in 2020 at the age of 85. Back in the 1965 World Series, he was the hero of the Los Angeles Dodgers. But then for a time, he got heavily into drugs. After recovering, he tried for the next 30 years to retrieve the championship ring he had sold to drug dealers. Drug and alcohol abuse had cost him everything from that magical season, including his uniform, glove, and even the bat he used to hit the winning home run in the deciding game.

In 2001, when the Dodgers president, Bob Graziano, learned that Johnson's World Series ring was for sale on the Internet, he did for Johnson what the former outfielder had been unable to do for himself. Graziano immediately wrote a check for \$3,457.00, to buy and then return the ring to its rightful owner.

In the same way, God has done for us what we were unable to do for ourselves. He paid the price for our sins with the blood of His Son. He bought us back. He redeemed

us so that we might be restored to our rightful place in the family of God. What an awesome gift!

Can you imagine Joseph's concerns, knowing that he would be responsible for the upbringing of the most important child ever born? Not in a palace, not with guards and soldiers, born with a price on his head, now to be raised by a solitary carpenter and his wife living in the backside of Palestine. God had asked Joseph to raise the Savior of the world – our redeemer – as his own son; most people might hesitate to accept that kind of responsibility.

Which is where we learn a third lesson from Joseph: a lesson in **READY OBEDIENCE**:

In the same way that his young wife Mary had responded to her angelic messenger, saying, *here am I, the servant of the Lord ...*

²⁴ *When Joseph awoke from sleep, **he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him**; he took her as his wife, ²⁵but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.* With Joseph, just as with Mary, there is no hesitation. He understood clearly what God expected of him, and he obeyed!

He would take Mary to be his wife and suffer the cutting remarks about their child conceived out of wedlock. He would obey in spite of the fact that this child of divine promise would be born and raised under a cloud of adultery. Even adding to those suspicions, rather than giving his adopted son his own name – as instructed – Joseph named Him "Jesus." Joseph believed God and obeyed Him.

Later responding to another dream, Joseph then takes Mary and the child, fleeing by night to Egypt.

- He again leaves behind his newly reestablished carpenter's business.
- He again leaves family and friends, to go into self-imposed exile for the sake of this child.
- Joseph did as he was commanded.

The Bible equates faith with obedience and obedience with faith. In other words, they are two sides of the same coin. You cannot have one without the other.

- Obedience is doing what God has said.
- Obedience is not doing what others say,
- Or doing what you wish God has said.
- It is simply doing what God says.

Jesus' little brother James would later write, ***so faith, by itself, if it has no works, is dead*** James 2:17. You can insert the word obedience here as well.

Surely, to obey is better than sacrifice!
1 Samuel 15:22)

As the prophet Samuel told disobedient King Saul, *'Has the LORD as great a delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obedience to the voice of the LORD? Surely, to obey is better than sacrifice!* (1 Samuel 15:22) It's vital to put our faith in Christ Jesus, but unless we are ready also to obey Him, then our faith is fruitless; useless.

D.L. Moody was conducting a series of meetings in Brocton, Massachusetts; leading the congregation in song was Daniel B. Towner. One night a young man responded to the alter call saying, "**I'm not quite sure -- but I'm going to trust and I'm going to obey.**" That statement struck Mr. Towner, who jotted the sentence down, and sent it to J.H. Sammis, a Presbyterian minister. Together they composed the hymn, "**Trust and Obey.**" The Christian's lifelong philosophy can be summed up in these three words.

The Bible uses some interesting figures to represent Christians and their relationship to God: Vine and branches, Sculptor and clay, Shepherd and sheep. An African convert used another metaphor. He prayed: "**O Lord, You are the needle and I am the thread.**"

Having just visited a school where girls were learning to sew, he noticed a simple principle: **wherever the needle went, the thread followed.** That, he decided, represented his relationship to God. If he would stay close to the Lord, praying, reading His Word, depending entirely upon Him and following Him, he would make it to heaven. He was simply the thread following the needle.

Each year as Christmas rolls around, different thoughts come to mind; "*visions of sugar plums dance in [our] heads.*" You may drive through your neighborhood and see an elaborate nativity display or a living crèche. Perhaps you'll even attend a play, with children or adults reenacting the events that brought our Lord and Savior into this world. But, throughout this season, throughout the rest of your life, I hope that you will pay special attention to that quiet man standing in the background and take home with you, these three lessons learned from a simple carpenter given the greatest honor. Are you a **righteous person**? Do you treat others with kindness, mercy, and forgiveness even when you think that you have been mistreated?

Have you been **redeemed by the blood of the lamb**?

Do you comprehend the sacrifice that Jesus made for you and me?

Have you personally accepted the first and most important gift of Christmas, by trusting in Jesus as your savior?

And finally are you living a life of **ready obedience**?

Are you learning God's Word and will as it is revealed to you in your Bible?

And one day, should an Angel appear to you, are you willing to follow God's command no matter what the cost?

These days, there are multiple sites on the internet, offering the most expensive Christmas gifts:

- For him, how about a Brunello Cuchinelly cashmere sweater for \$2,000.00
- Or a pre-owned Rolex Submariner for a mere \$14,790.00
- And for her, how about a gold and sapphire tennis necklace for the small price of \$15,340.00 – but you had better hurry, there is only one left.

By far the greatest, most precious, most expensive gift ever given was "***the free gift of God, [which] is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.***" Rom. 6:23

Have you accepted that gift?

If you are not a Christian this morning, then we invite you to "*Trust and obey, for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.*"

The invitation is open, if you have never personally done so and would like to know more about putting your faith in Jesus ... then I, would be honored to speak with you following this service.

Now let's pray, thanking God for His most precious gift of love, and for that humble couple willing to raise Him as their own.