

## Opening

- This Advent season, we are taking a journey- looking through the eyes of some of the biblical Characters of Christmas.
- As Sandra mentioned last week, as we do that, we may find that their stories are in many ways, our stories.
  - o Last week we heard Sandra tell us about Zechariah and Elizabeth- two people who lived righteous lives.
    - We looked at the faith they had, to believe what was for most anyone an unbelievable happening.
    - We learned of the trust they had in God and how God answered their prayers in a very special way.
- Today, we continue our look at the Advent story through the eyes of another character in this chronicle- that of Joseph.
  - o And what an amazing story we have in him, the man who would be asked by God to be the earthly father of Emmanuel – God with us- the long-promised and expected deliverer of God's people.
    - It would be Joseph who more than any other human, would shape the character of Jesus, as he grew from a boy into man.
    - And in accepting this honor, Joseph had to put his full trust in God.
- **So, let's begin by reading the scripture, shall we?**
- **Read 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 with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss 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 conceive and bear 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 borne a son; and he named him Jesus.**

### Our Entry into the Story

- Our entrance into this story comes after Mary has received a visit from the angel Gabriel, where she is told that she will give birth to God’s son.
  - And Mary then goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth, whom we heard about in last week’s message.
  - Mary has gone to visit Elizabeth, who is six months expectant with John the Baptist and Mary stays with her to care for her, through the birth of John.
  - And then after the birth of John, Mary returns home to Nazareth.
- The Gospels don’t really say much as to when Mary actually informed Joseph that she was with child.
  - However, given that Mary was away for three months, we can at least surmise that Mary did not immediately tell Joseph and according to some early church writings, Mary did not immediately reveal that she was with child.
  - So, this is the scene: Mary has been away for three months, while Joseph has been working, planning and probably saving his money for their marriage and life together.
    - Mary finally returns and Joseph eagerly goes to see her and discovers that Mary is three months with child.

### How Joseph must have felt

- How do you think Joseph felt upon learning this news?
  - Joseph had been planning for a long time, to marry the love of his life.
    - They had been engaged and Joseph had promised his heart to Mary.
    - He had envisioned a wonderful life together with Mary.
    - And now, Joseph realizes that the woman he loves is going to have a child and this child isn’t his.
- Can you imagine how he felt?
  - I think I can understand at least a little.
  - You know, my wife truly is the love of my life, but she wasn’t the first with whom I THOUGHT I was in love.

- Like most boys growing up, I had my heart broken more than once and I recall vividly a girlfriend I had back in high school.
- Well, that is for about a month, I had girlfriend.
- A friend told me that she was interested in me and she lived only a block away, so I began visiting her and over the course of a month I visited several times.
- We would sit near each other, talk and hold hands and it was all pretty innocent, but in that short time, I was smitten.
- It seemed like we were hitting things off pretty well and then one day at school, my friends informed me that my girl had thrown a party at her home the previous weekend.
  - Now, what kind of girl throws a party and doesn't invite her boyfriend?
    - The kind of girl who doesn't have a boyfriend, that's who
    - I was pretty devastated to discover in this way, that I no longer had a girlfriend.
  - And it got worse as it came out that my girl had apparently decided to dump me for one of my best friends.
    - They had been an item at the party and were now an ongoing item
  - And all of my friends knew before I did.
- In that moment, my seemingly ideal relationship had come crashing down around me.
  - And for the longest time, I couldn't hardly look at that girl.
  - I was hurt, disappointed and deeply embarrassed.
    - And all of my friends knew it.
  - You know, we guys like to think we're tough and like most men I carry my emotions inside.
  - But I'll tell that heartbreak like that is something that cuts deep and it is deeply painful and it took me a long time to move past that hurt.
- Do you think Joseph might have felt a little bit that way?
  - Most of us at least once in our lives, have been in a situation where we've felt the pain of betrayal.
  - And it's reasonable to imagine that Joseph felt betrayed.

- And imagine Mary saying to Joseph “But, wait, you don’t understand, I haven’t been with anyone. This child is from God!”
  - Can’t you just envision Joseph saying “You’re kidding me, right?”
  - “You actually expect me to believe that story?”

## Our hurt can blind us

- Joseph was hurt, disappointed and embarrassed.
  - And he was possibly worried that Mary was delusional, coming to him with this story about having God’s child.
  - Joseph didn’t believe Mary. Verse 19 of the scripture tells us that Joseph was planning to quietly dismiss Mary and he wouldn’t have done that if he believed her.
- Joseph was a righteous man, who in that moment, saw his perfect little world come crashing down around him.
  - God was honoring Joseph, yet to Joseph, it didn’t feel like an honor.
    - He was too blinded by his pain.
    - In the midst of his heartache, he could not see God working in his life.
- And don’t you think that sometimes it’s like that for us too.
  - We try to live a good life, according to God’s will and yet, we experience times of pain and anguish which get in the way of our ability to see God’s plan for us.
  - That’s how life is, right?
    - There is no getting around it- in life, we will have moments of struggle.
    - And that is a reality, whether or not you are doing God’s will.
    - But if we can take those moments and place them in God’s hands, imagine how God will redeem them.
      - Just as God did with Joseph, God will see us through.
  - But up to this point, though, Joseph can’t turn his situation over to God- he just can’t.
- Now, Joseph could have sought revenge- as the laws of the day would have allowed or even required.
  - He could have had her stoned to death for this sin.
  - Yet as hurt as he was, Joseph could not cause harm to the woman he loves.
    - Instead he makes the decision to quietly leave her.

- It was his act of kindness to Mary.

## God comes to Joseph in a dream

- This would be the perfect ending were this a tragic melodrama, you know?
  - Joseph leaves Mary and goes off into the sunset, broken-hearted.
    - Mary calling after him, pleading her case- her voice becoming evermore faint with each step Joseph takes.
  - But we know the story doesn't end there.
  - Just when Joseph is about to give up and leave Mary, God intervenes.
    - In a dream God sends an angel to Joseph and the angel tells him, "do not be afraid- go ahead and take Mary as your wife."
    - Through this dream the angel shares God's vision with Joseph and Joseph now understands what God is up to.
- I don't know if you remember your dreams or not.
  - I don't very often, but when I do, it's usually a dream that brings insight into something I have been wrestling with.
  - And I find this part of the story amazing and important.
    - Because, had Joseph not paid attention to his dream, he might very well have left Mary and then life for Mary and Jesus would have been very different.
  - But when God spoke, Joseph paid attention.
    - And Joseph believed it was God speaking and he obeyed God.
    - Without that, this story would have had a very different ending.
      - Without that, we might not have the story of Christmas.

## God speaks to us

- As people of faith, we know that God speaks to us in subtle ways- in our dreams- in that "ah ha" moment of enlightenment - in that inspiring moment during prayer.
  - Perhaps even during a sermon.
  - God speaks through a gentle whisper and the challenge is we are often too busy living our lives, listening to the chatter around us, that we can't hear God's gentle whisper.
  - So, perhaps, we need to be expecting God to speak- and we need to be listening for that.

- And when God's voice speaks, we need to obey.

<PAUSE> **Wrap it up**

- This story of Joseph is an amazing story that teaches us many things
  - In this story, we learn that heartbreak and pain will come to us even when we lead a life in pursuit of God.
  - In this story, Joseph teaches us how it really is done- that when pain and suffering abound, our response is to put our trust in God and do what is right.
  - Joseph's story teaches us about our need to listen and obey God- who speaks to us in many ways.
  - In Joseph's story, we find our story, and we discover that we too are part of God's plan.
- In telling his story this morning, Joseph lets us know a little of what he went through and the love he had for Mary and the trust he placed in God, to transform his worst of circumstances, into the story of Christmas.
- May it be, that God will do the same for us as well.
- Amen