

December 19 2010 Sermon

Matthew 1:18-25

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

19 And her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

20 But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

23 "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us).

24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife,

25 but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Include: the virgin birth as sign of God's salvation from OT;

If Santa Claus were to forget a child and go right past his house on his yearly midnight flight, it would spark a major scandal. Not even his busy December workload or tight flight schedule would suffice as an excuse. Perhaps it is because we are so busy at this time of the year that we become forgetful? I don't know. But there is one person who constantly gets passed over and almost forgotten at Christmas? All the Christmas scenes and decorations show Santa Claus, or Mary, sometimes Jesus makes the cut, but Joseph only seems to appear merely as an extra, or perhaps, just as a stage hand.

But maybe that's the key thing about Joseph; he stays backstage and is often unnoticed, even forgotten. He doesn't make any noise or clamor. He doesn't try to get our attention. He is not seeking praise or recognition for what he does. He is not expecting anyone to thank him and give him honors and accolades. He is content just to do "as the angel of the Lord commanded him..." without making any fuss about himself. Rather than seek honor and glory from men, his honor and glory are in just being the stepfather of our Lord, protecting him from Herod's murderers, providing for his fleshly needs, raising him as a child and teaching him as a father.

And that is where righteous Joseph puts us all to shame. By comparison, we are but selfish, self-centered, bratty little children. Little, not in stature or age, but in faith, character, and discipleship.

Unlike Joseph we make sure everyone knows about our accomplishments, we want the thanks, the praise, the recognition. At home we say, "Look what I did for you today." At school we say, "Look, I got straight A's." At work we say, "Look at my accomplishments, don't you think I deserve a raise?" At church we complain, "All the work I do around here, and no one even as much as says 'Thank you.'" Unlike righteous Joseph, we want the credit and honor.

Now don't get me wrong. I am not saying we shouldn't thank or recognize others for their efforts and service, that is a good thing to do. In fact Jesus commands us to be thankful and appreciative of what others do for us. No, we are not talking about the recipient, but the doer. When we do something we shouldn't do things just for the recognition, nor even expect to be recognized, or worse still, demand to be recognized. That just goes to show how much smaller we are than righteous Joseph.

But Joseph, when God told him to do something, he simply did it. No objections, no "I don't have time, Lord," no "It's too much work," or "I'm too busy, Lord," but he willingly and lovingly obeyed. Again, quite a contrast to us who are so often lazy about going to church; uninterested in Bible study, who tend to let our minds wander during prayer, or nod off during worship. We just don't get excited about evangelism and witnessing our faith. We are slack in helping our neighbor in need, inviting others to hear the Word of God; caring for a sick person; providing shelter for the homeless; or providing food for the poor. Unlike Joseph, when God tells us to love our neighbor in word and deed, we don't come running saying "Here am I, Lord," we often turn a deaf ear to God and harden our hearts toward our neighbor.

But Joseph was a righteous man. He was betrothed to Mary; not yet married. He did not have sexual relations with her. Sex outside marriage is adultery, and Joseph was no adulterer, he was a righteous man.

But when Mary was "found to be with child," it appeared that she had committed adultery. That would have separated them and put an end to their betrothal. He would have been forced to divorce her. Yet, even when he thought she was an adulteress, Joseph continued to love her and sought only her good in a way that would not shame her or give her a bad reputation. He is a picture of God, who loves us and seeks our welfare even when we are unfaithful to him. We go about our business of neglecting the things of God, demeaning his gift of the word; belittling the sacraments; seeking our own agendas, pride, honor and recognition, and in spite of all that he still is faithful to us. God continues to love us and is determined to draw us back to himself.

And for that reason God calls us to repent of our sin; our unfaithfulness to Him, of our desire for recognition and honor from men, in order that the separation between God and man be ended. Even though man has divorced himself from God, that separation must come to an end and man and God become married again. That is what Christmas is all about, the marriage of God and mankind. And righteous Joseph got a front row seat at the wedding.

The angel spoke two names to Joseph: Emmanuel and Jesus. Each of these names is a miracle. The first miracle was the Emmanuel miracle. The name Emmanuel means "God with us." Isaiah said "a virgin would conceive and bear a son and his name would be Emmanuel." This was a sign of God's

deliverance; salvation of his people. So right before his very eyes, Joseph witnessed a divine wedding: God and man joined together. Conceived by the Holy Spirit in a human virgin, Jesus was the union of God and man. Just as God had said to Adam, "A man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife and the two shall become one flesh," so God became one flesh with us humans, flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone. Emmanuel, God with us, doesn't just mean he is sitting beside us; He's not just near to help us in time of need, or carry us when we are weak. It means He is living in us, and we in him. It means God has joined the human race to himself; that the human now shares in the divine. That is the miracle of Christmas; the Emmanuel miracle. The "God with us" miracle. For "in him we live and move and have our being." (Acts 17). You are the temple of the Holy Spirit, that is, the dwelling place of God.

Christmas is more than just God's Son being born into the world, it is God joining himself to humanity. It is God and man becoming one. It is God becoming incarnate in human flesh and bone. Just like Joseph and Mary when later they married, and the two "became one flesh." God and man were reunited after thousands of years of separation because of the sin of Adam. And the two became one; God and man are one in the person of Jesus Christ.

And that reality of man and God joined together, living in each other, became a reality for you personally at your Baptism. For in Baptism you are joined to Christ; your human nature partakes of God's divine nature. Baptism is your personal Christmas; the Emmanuel miracle. That is why it is traditional to perform Baptisms on Christmas Eve.

But for that to happen there had to be one other miracle; the Jesus miracle. The other name the angel spoke to Joseph was Jesus, meaning "God saves." For sinners cannot be one with a holy God. God is light and in him is no darkness at all. There can be no fellowship between sin and holiness, between light and dark. The holy cannot be joined to the unholy. So this "God saves" man came to make us holy, and he did this by his death on the cross. He poured out his precious, holy blood to wash us from our sin and unholiness. Jesus, the "God saves" man, saved us from sin and death. The Jesus miracle is the cross where your sins were forgiven. Where you were purchased by the blood of Jesus so you can be joined to him in holy matrimony. The cross is the Jesus miracle where "Christ...gave himself up for his bride, the church, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way that husbands should love their wives." (Eph 5).

That is the Jesus miracle; that he saved us from sin so that the church could become his bride, like Joseph who married Mary later on, and so we could be baptized into oneness with God himself. By the Jesus miracle, we were washed from our self-centered desire for praise and recognition from men. By the Jesus miracle Jesus makes up the difference in our lazy, lukewarm attitude toward serving him. By the Jesus miracle Jesus makes up for our lack of love for our neighbor, our lack of zeal in spreading his word, our lack of compassion for the poor and needy. Your sins are forgiven and paid for so you can become one with God and take part in the Emmanuel miracle.

Oneness with God! Living in God, having our being, our identity, our life in God. That is your glory and honor. God is the source of all goodness, all life, all love, all joy and all peace. You baptized believers are wrapped in Christ, surrounded by God's being, and share in his life and existence and goodness.

This is your identity; as sons of God, you share in his divine life, in the eternal existence of the Holy Trinity. This is the sum and source of your existence. This defines who you are, how you live, what you say, what you do.

Joseph witnessed the Emmanuel miracle of God with us; you have an even greater privilege. You take part in the Emmanuel miracle and are the recipient of the Jesus miracle. Every Sunday these miracles take place. Every time you come to the altar to eat his body and drink his blood, God becomes one with you, entering into you bodily, joining himself to you and strengthening the union and bond between you and Him, between your humanity and his divinity. With every drop of his holy, precious blood you drink, you receive the Jesus miracle; the forgiveness of your sins and eternal salvation. Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us!

Amen.