

LARGE-PRINT

Devotions for Week of December 9, 2018

“It’s A Boy!”: Joseph Speaks

North East United Methodist Church

Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian

Sunday, December 9, 2018

Read Matthew 1: 18-25. Last week we looked at Mary’s reaction to the news, “It’s A Boy!” Her reaction was one of obedience and a willingness to allow God to use her and work through her to enhance and bring about the Kingdom of God. This week we look at Joseph and his reaction to the news. Joseph showed obedience, love, courage, and honor.

In Matthew 1: 18-25 we read how the angel of the Lord came to Joseph 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. She will give birth to a Son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”*

Joseph responds by being obedient. He does not divorce Mary and instead faces public humiliation. He has no sexual relations with Mary until after the birth of Jesus. He follows God’s direction, naming the child Jesus.

God worked through Mary’s obedience and Jesus was born. Through Joseph’s obedience, Jesus was adopted as a true son in the line of David, fulfilling the many prophecies spoken by God through the prophets, including Isaiah in 2 Samuel 7: 11-17, that *“a descendent of David would sit on his throne forever.”*

Nathanael Emmons writes, *“Obedience to God is the most infallible evidence of sincere and supreme love to him.”* Joseph clearly loved God and obeyed God, taking Mary as his wife,

even if it meant public humiliation. He is an example to each one of us as God calls on us to “step out” and serve Him, to make changes in our lives, to refocus and change our priorities, to think of others before ourselves. Joseph teaches us that we are called to obedience and through our obedience we will experience God and be blessed in ways we cannot even begin to imagine.

What is God asking you to do? What is God asking you to change? What ministry is God calling you to? Will you be obedient? Pray that God will give you the heart and strength to be obedient to Him.

Monday, December 10, 2018

Read Matthew 1: 18-19 and Matthew 5. We read about Joseph and learn that, before he was told the baby Mary was carrying was of the Holy Spirit, he “*did not want to expose her to public disgrace*” so he decided to divorce her quietly. Joseph is described in these same verses as a “*righteous*” man.

What makes Joseph a “*righteous*” man? Remember in Israel at the time, engagements were binding premarital contracts leading to marriage. During the year of engagement, the couple behaved like husband and wife (*except that they did not live together or have sex*). To break off such an engagement, a divorce was required. Sexual unfaithfulness during this stage was adultery, the penalty for which was death by stoning (Leviticus 20: 10; Deuteronomy 22: 23-24).

Joseph had every right under the law to divorce Mary publicly; yet, Joseph decided to “*divorce her quietly*” out of his love for her, so she would not be “*publicly disgraced.*”

Think about Joseph. Joseph restrained his anger, his shock, his deep sorrow. This was the person he loved and had

committed his life to and in his eyes, she had slept with another man, turned her back on him; yet, he did not seek retaliation. In fact, Joseph did not even seek the punishment that was due him, that the law allowed for. Instead he chose to react in love.

In Matthew 5, Jesus preaches the Sermon on the Mount. In this message Jesus preaches he gets the Israelites and us to look at the law, but to also look at the “*Spirit of the law.*” Jesus says over and over again, “*You-have-heard-that-it-was-said-but-I-say-to-you.*” Jesus is saying, “Ok, here’s the law...for example, ‘an eye for an eye...a tooth for a tooth.’” But Jesus takes it further and goes beyond the law saying, “*Love your enemies.*” Jesus makes it clear that obeying the law is only the first step...at some point we need to move beyond the law to even a higher standard. We need to love, to break the vicious cycle of retaliation and hatred. We need to move beyond the law to having hearts that are “*after God’s own heart.*”

Joseph is described as “*righteous,*” not because he obeys the law but because he has a heart for God and tries to follow God’s direction, even at threat to his own reputation. He reacts to the news that his betroth is pregnant by going beyond the law and reacting in love.

Where are you? Do you react to others based on rules & expectations or do you react based on love, grace and compassion? How Christ-like are you in the way you treat others, especially those who have hurt you or been unfaithful? What can you learn from Joseph?

Tuesday, December 11, 2018

Read Matthew 1: 18-25. Joseph not only reacts to the news of Mary’s pregnancy with obedience to God and with

going beyond the law, reacting in love, trying to help Mary not be disgraced, but Joseph also shows courage.

Despite personal embarrassment, despite social ostracism, Joseph believed God and married the young girl carrying a child that was not His own. He also shows courage in protecting his wife and child.

C. Raymond van Pletzen writes, *“Courage is cultivated by learning that God is more powerful than any threat that may come our way. David learned about God from nature, from history and from the Scriptures while attending his father’s sheep. That’s why David fearlessly faced up to Goliath, confident that the Commander of the Armies of heaven was with him. Joseph had cultivated his relationship with God and so he was ready when the day of testing came.”*

Pletzen goes on to say, *“Children Need Courageous Dads! Children want to be able to boast ‘My Dad’s bigger than your Dad!’ It gives them security to know that their Dad is brave enough and strong enough to protect them. Wives Long for Courageous Husbands! One of the greatest statements of a husband’s love is when he protects her regardless of the cost to himself.”*

Furthermore, Pletzen writes, *“God is still at work creating courageous men like Joseph. Men with moral courage and manly courage. Chris Spielman is such a man. When Chris Spielman played for the Buffalo Bills, he was everything a middle linebacker should be: tough, strong and smart, with passion, total commitment and loyalty to the game. He played the entire 1995 season with a torn pectoral muscle that he sustained in the season opener.*

But the game took a distant second place in this thinking during the 1998 season. He chose to stay home. He cooked, took

care of his kids, and cared for his wife—by choice. Stephanie, Chris’s wife, was struggling through the stark reality of breast cancer. Surgery, chemotherapy and nausea were Stephanie’s opponents. During her fight Chris was at her side; his actions supported his "family before job" credo.

Asked by a reporter from the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle if he’d consider a return to the Bills late in the season, Spielman said, "I’d play in a heartbeat, but what kind of man would I be if I backed out on my word to her? I wouldn’t be a man at all."

Football fans saw Spielman as a man because of his aggressive, leave-it-all-on-the-field style of play. But what really makes him a man? It’s his personal sacrifice and unending commitment and loyalty to his wife."

Every Christmas we hear a story of a very courageous man who quietly stands in the background of the “greatest story ever told.” Next time you look at a Nativity Scene and see Joseph standing in the background, think of the courage and ruggedness of this man. And stand tall and be men and women of courage, stepping out in faith, know God will walk with you, will protect you as you stand firm and protect those around you, stand up for those who cannot stand up for themselves, and stand firm in what you believe, professing Christ in a culture that ignores Him. Pray that God will grant you the courage of Joseph.

Wednesday, December 12, 2018

Read Matthew 2: 13-23. Joseph showed great courage, obedience, and faithfulness not only in marrying Mary and trusting God, but also in protecting wife and child in Jesus’ turbulent and life-threatening early years. He protected them on

the dangerous roads to Bethlehem, and the desert journey to Egypt, on the path back to Northern Israel.

Having heard from the wise men that they were seeking for the one who had been born to be king of the Jews, Herod commanded that all boys under the age of two were to be killed. An angel of the Lord commanded Joseph to take the child and his mother first to Egypt and then later back to northern Israel. This meant months of dangerous travel over hostile terrain. Joseph probably walked most of the way! God knew that Joseph was courageous enough and strong to handle the task.

Are you protecting the loved ones in your life? Are you willing to sacrifice your wants for them? Are you protecting the church family that you are part of? Are you protecting those who are in need? Pray that God will open your eyes & give you strength.

Thursday, December 13, 2018

Read Romans 15: 1-4 & Philippians 2: 3-11. Jesus did not consider “*equality with God,*” but instead “*made himself nothing,*” “*humbled himself,*” and became “*obedient to death, even death on a cross.*” For many of us this is difficult. We want to be the center of attention. Or we feel because our lives are ordinary and not famous that we don’t really amount to anything. Yet, God wants us to not only be humble, but to also recognize that we are vitally important.

Joseph had a background role in the “greatest story ever told.” We find him standing next to Mary. We never see him speak. We need to look at a life like Joseph's because Joseph is somebody like us. Joseph is a member of the supporting cast in

the movie. He is one of the faces in the background. In fact, Joseph is introduced to us in Matthew, Chapter 1, verse 16 as Joseph, the husband of Mary. The reason why we know Joseph at all is because he is connected to Mary. Joseph is somebody who is not necessarily at the center of what seems to be happening.

Yet, Joseph's role, as ours, is vitally important. Rev. John Schmidt, in talking about his church, writes, "***there might be invisible Christians, but there are never unimportant ones.*** *Last week we had a funeral here at the church. Next week we will have another. During the funeral service there were two people up front. I was up front and the organist and yet as I walked around that day and related to the family, I started to realize that there were perhaps 20-30 people that had been involved in making this whole experience of the funeral and all a ministry to this family. There were people who had worked on the bulletins, the people who were greeting, the people who had provided the food, the people who had visited before and there were countless, just a large number of people within the life of this church that had dedicated themselves to this ministry in the middle of the week, even to the point that early that morning somebody came and made sure that the sound booth was all set up for the funeral. You know, every organization has its visible people and the invisible....you know there is a much larger group of invisible people. People like those who work up in the booth, people who come and prepare the sanctuary on Sunday, those who get ready in the classrooms, the people who provide the flowers and arrange them and it's not just what people do here in the church, there are people who are praying for this church in their homes. This is valuable. People who do the hospitality outside the doors. It's not just what we do in official*

Christian service. Just raising our kids to walk with God, to be a Christian that has integrity in the workplace and all of these things are in part and parts of the invisible life of this church.”

God uses regular people with regular lives. There is never anyone that's unimportant to God and there is never anyone that's unimportant to God's plans. Pray that God will help you be humble and see how you can play an important, though maybe behind the scenes, role in building the kingdom of God.

Friday, December 14, 2018

Read Matthew 1: 18-25 again. Joseph, like many, lived a normal, ordinary life, but his ordinary life was interrupted by “*divine interruptions.*” God is ready to “*interrupt*” your ordinary life. Don’t be afraid. Sit back and listen and be blessed. You have a role to play.

Saturday, December 15, 2018

Take time to pray, examine your hearts, and prepare this season of Advent for the coming of Christ in Bethlehem and the Christ who we will stand before when He returns. And **Don’t Forget to Invite Someone to Church Tomorrow!**

