

JOSEPH: VOICE OF REASON

SERIES: The Voices of Christmas

SERMON: #4 - Joseph: The Voice of Reason

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 1:16-25

WEDNESDAY BLURB: This Sunday is our big Christmas concert, with choir, orchestra, skits by the kids, and carols. You don't want to miss it! There will also be a guest appearance from Joseph, the human father of Jesus. Joseph, a simple carpenter, brings the voice of reason amid the twelve voices of Christmas we hear this year. Christmas challenges our reason, our thinking. It forces us to look at things differently. God is doing things that don't necessarily make sense. Come hear how in Christmas, God challenges you to rethink your life, and shows you what you couldn't see before!

PP#1: Matthew 1:16-25

... [1:16] And Jacob [was] the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ. [17] Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Christ.

[18] This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.

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PP#2: Matthew 1:16-25

[19] Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

[20] But after he had considered 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 home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. [21] 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."

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PP#3: Matthew 1:16-25

[22] All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: [23] "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel"—which means, "God with us."

[24] When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. [25] But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave Him the name Jesus.

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PP#4: The Voices of Christmas

Joseph: The Voice of Reason

"When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife." - Matthew 1:24

JOSEPH SPEAKS:

[Holding a carpentry tool.]

I'm just a simple craftsman. My hands tell you that I work with wood and tools. You can look at them and see a history of the work I've done. It seems there's always some kind of scar or cut. You show me a man's hands, and I can tell you his work. Fishermen have different hands than farmers.

PP#5: Image of Joseph or a 1st century carpenter at work

I am a carpenter. It's honest, hard work. I come from the house and family of David, you know. My name, Joseph. I'm named after the patriarch—you know, the one with coat of many colors. He was sold into slavery, but then God used that to save his family when he was able to bring them down to Egypt during the famine.

As important as all that sounds, I just live in Nazareth up in Galilee. My hometown, is, well...you might say we are country people. In Jerusalem they have a great deal of fun with the accent of our speech. We're just simple folk, kind of removed from the big centers of power and importance. But that doesn't mean we can't live decent and honorable lives.

PP#6: Image of Joseph and Mary together (holding hands?) with Mary not looking pregnant.

So where do I get off marrying a girl who was pregnant? Yes, she was pregnant before I married her, and no, I wasn't the father! It was, of course, an arranged marriage by our families. It seems like I always knew from my youngest days that the first son of Jacob would marry the first daughter of Eli. But the way things happened, the first son of Jacob (that's me), I came along quite

a few years before the first daughter of Eli did. I watched her grow up. My friends were all married and had children, while she was still just a little girl. Oh, I took some teasing from my friends about getting gray hairs before getting a wife. I can take some kidding.

We were formally betrothed. [The way we do things, the betrothal is a full legal ceremony. At the betrothal we are pledged to each other for life and we may be called husband and wife, although we remain apart until the actual wedding some time later. A betrothal is serious and binding and it cannot be broken without an official legal divorce. Our people like it that way. (It sure is different than the way they do things in the countries around us, where they do not know God. It seems they don't even take marriage to be serious and binding.)] Anyway, as she came of age, we started to spend some time together. I took seriously my pledge to provide for her and care for her. She was a lovely girl, so gentle and sweet. I worried she wouldn't care for me, as I was twice her age. It wasn't really unreasonable. She was not quite 15, and I was nearly 30! Yet, she always smiled at me, with that warm, special smile. I felt I was special to her. And I would do anything to make sure she was happy.

Well, not long after our betrothal, Mary suddenly went away for a few months before the marriage, a trip to her cousins in the hill country. I worried why she left. Did she not want to marry me? Was I too old? Did she not care for me? I didn't know what to think. I did miss her, terribly, and I looked for her to come back. I wanted to talk with her, explain things, tell her how I would be good to her. I had to convince her.

PP#7: *Mary, very pregnant. Perhaps with Joseph (or others) looking at her shocked/surprised.*

But then, after three months, she did come back, and it was all too obvious that she was pregnant. She was showing. I just stood there, frozen. She just looked at me, deeply into my eyes, worried, but not ashamed, hoping for acceptance.

What was I to think? I want to be decent and honorable. And I just couldn't believe it of Mary either. But there it was. My heart was broken. I couldn't marry her. Marry a pregnant girl? Do you know what that would mean? I just couldn't get my mind around it.

I had two choices. I had the right to take her to court before the elders and prove that without my involvement she was found to be pregnant. A lawsuit like that would officially clear my name, but it certainly would be hard on Mary. She would be liable to the full punishment of the law, and Moses commanded that an unfaithful wife should be stoned. Now, the rabbis had provided many exceptions and modifications to that command, so I knew Mary would probably not be stoned. But I didn't want to take her to court.

So my other choice was to give her a simple bill of divorce, and not even bring up how she was pregnant. I could do this privately without getting into all the legal affairs of court. It would not clear my own name officially, but everyone would know, and it would be easier on Mary and her family.

I hid in my workshop, keeping my hands busy so I could think, and pray. God would want me to be kind to Mary. A simple bill of divorce seemed like the more reasonable choice.

PP#8: *Joseph dozing in his workshop, dozing off, having the dream of the angel.*

I am the voice of reason. I just about had my mind made up when I had a dream. I did. I saw God's angel, who told me to marry her anyway. I mean, it's bad enough when the whole city is whispering about this pregnant girl, but then they would all think that I was the father of the baby!

It didn't make sense. But the angel called me "son of David." He told me not to be afraid to take Mary as my wife. He said that Mary had not been unfaithful to me, and that the baby growing inside of her was from the Holy Spirit. He told me that we should name this son Jesus, which means "God saves," because He would save His people from their sins.

I guess you might say I had some new thinking to do! I am a son of David in the legal line of his throne, and I know God promised a messiah in my line to be king again. So, I had a responsibility larger than my own personal concerns. If God by His Spirit had put this baby into Mary's womb, then I should agree if He wanted to appoint me to be Mary's husband and the man of that household.

How can you argue with the plan of God? You can cut a long piece of wood shorter, but you can't cut a short piece longer. It doesn't make sense.

God had given me a new piece of wood. I had to change my thinking. My character, my good name...I didn't have much else. But, God commands obedience, regardless of what made sense to me. So, I didn't cancel the wedding. I let the villagers talk. One of the hardest things I ever did. I pledged myself to a woman very pregnant with someone else's child. Hmm. A new piece of wood!

PP# 9: *Image of the manger with Joseph there, perhaps the shepherds, too.*

Well, then we went to Bethlehem for the Roman census. The son was born there. Shepherds came that night to see him. They said angels had visited them out in the field and sang praises to God for our son's birth. Imagine! The next week we took the boy into Jerusalem into the temple.

Then it seemed like a good idea just to stay there in Bethlehem - not so many whispering neighbors. A cousin got me work in the shop of a friend. I again put my hands to work. We might just have stayed in Bethlehem, but then these magi came, men from the East looking for the King of the Jews. They bowed to Him on the dirt floor of our little house. I just couldn't make sense of it all!

And then, I don't quite understand it all, but somehow their dealings with Herod put us in danger. You see, I had another dream. This time the angel said to pick up and flee for Egypt. I, Joseph was going to Egypt like the patriarch Joseph of old! So we moved again. I didn't much like Egypt. We found a synagogue and lived in a Jewish neighborhood, and I again worked with my hands. But I really started to miss Galilee, my own people. Herod finally died, and the angel visited me a third time! He told me it was safe to go back. So we took the boy and went back to Galilee, Nazareth. Maybe the neighbors would be tired of whispering.

PP#10: *Joseph teaching Jesus carpentry as a young boy in a wood shop.*

We made our life in Nazareth. I held his hands and trained them to a carpenter's work. After all, the great King David had been a simple shepherd. This boy, no matter how special, could begin as a carpenter. But what then? The other children came along, some with good, strong hands able to get everything a piece of wood had to offer. But not Him. His hands were not really made for carpenter's work. His hands were special, they had other business—business the angels had sung about, business that brought magi from the East, business that scares the tin-crowned kings of this world.

I wonder how it will turn out. I don't know. But I can usually look at a man's hands and read his work. And Jesus' hands were different, destined for something special. Show me his hands, and I'll tell you his work.

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SCRIPTURE READING: Erik K

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR DEC. 13, 2015

Christmas Series: “The Voices of Christmas”

Sermon #4: “Joseph: The Voice of Reason”

Opening prayer

Introductions: Introduce yourself & share a time when God changed your thinking.

Context: Skim Matthew 1:1-15. Review: What is going on in this chapter?

Compare with Luke 3:3-37. What are the differences, and how do you explain them?

Read: Matthew 1:16-25

1. Verse 16. Why is it important to trace Joseph’s ancestry? What does this tell you about Jesus?
2. Verse 17. What significance might there be in the three different generations of fourteen?
3. Verse 18. What is the point being made that Joseph and Mary had not consummated their marriage before Jesus was born? What does this tell you about Jesus?
4. Verse 19. What can you infer from this verse about what kind of a man Joseph was?
5. What would you have done? Share about how you have struggled with tough decisions that affect your morals and personal reputation. What did you do? Why?
6. Verse 20. How does this verse inform your answer to question #1 above? Who is Jesus?
7. Verse 21. What does the name Jesus mean? [Hint: Does your Bible have a footnote about it?] What does this tell you about Jesus?
8. Verses 22-23. Look up Isaiah 7:14. Why might it be so important for Matthew to explain the connection to what the prophet Isaiah had said? What does this tell you about Jesus?
9. Verses 24-25. What can you infer from these verses about what kind of a man Joseph was?
10. Application: What will you take away from this passage? How will you live it out?