

The Rev. Chris Christy
Sermon / Year B
4th Sunday of Advent
12/19-20/2020

Readings
2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16
Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26
Romans 16:25-27
Luke 1:26-38

The Journey

We are now in our 4th week of Advent and so we light the 4th candle which some call the Candle of **Joy**, or The Angels Candle of **Peace**. As I researched what was going on, during this period of time, I realized it was a difficult and trying time for Mary and Joseph, a time which **Joy** and **Peace** was a stretch from the truth.

Advent time is one of reflection and full of celebration as we wait a new beginning with the birth of the Messiah. Our gospel reading today gives us an insight to what was occurring in the background that could have prevented the glorious birth. For Mary and Joseph this was a time of distress, disbelief, and discovery.

Mary and Joseph were engaged to be married when Mary found she was with child. She was a young, confused, Jewish girl and now distressed as she realized she was no longer a virgin. Mary had told no one that she had conceived the child through the Holy Spirit. This placed her in real danger, culturally, even though it was a great testimony to her faith and trust in God when she said yes to bear the Christ Child. Mary had agreed to be a vessel or conduit for the love and purposes of God. Mary was on one hand happy and humble to be trusted by God with such a task, but she also felt conflicted by what Joseph might think and do.

With Mary, now pregnant out of wedlock, it was Joseph who became a critical part of God's plan. Have you ever thought that it was Joseph who held the future of the Christ child in his hands? So even though it was Mary, who God entrusted to carry the Messiah, it was Joseph whom we need to follow.

When Mary told Joseph she was with Child, before coming together in marriage, he became distraught and confused. Joseph had a hard time understanding how Mary could become pregnant through the Spirit of God.

Joseph absolutely loved Mary. He also had a hard time believing she would commit adultery. Joseph realized he had at least two options.

1. He could break off the engagement and expose Mary to the chief rabbi of the village and have her stoned to death for her act of adultery, killing her and the unborn child. This would be a just act in front of the law. This would leave him clean and righteous!
2. He could hurry with the marriage and take responsibility for the pregnancy of Mary. This could be a problem if people became concerned with the urgency for marriage. This option could risk his reputation.

Mary knew that Joseph was a faithful, righteous, and a good man who was "An observer of the Law". She knew Joseph's decision would be based on the Mosaic Law in reference to such a matter as stated in

Deuteronomy;

"If the tokens of virginity were not found in the young woman, then they shall bring out the young woman to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her to death with stones, because she has wrought folly in Israel by playing the harlot in her father's house; so, you shall purge the evil from the midst of you" (Deuteronomy 22:20-21).

It seemed the Jews of the First Century had varying interpretations about whether stoning was required or simply permitted. Joseph, on account of his virtue and patience, looked for and sensed some freedom in not "exposing" Mary to the full effects of the law, that of stoning. But it didn't seem he could find a way that he could take her sinful ways into his home. He realized the social and family pressures to free himself of her would be strong.

Joseph then decided to marry her prior to her showing with child so no one would be the wiser. Joseph feared that if anyone found out he would be rejected by his family, shunned by neighbors, and others for bringing evil into his home by taking Mary in. You see Joseph was a businessman who needed to maintain a good reputation to continue in his trade. Joseph knew he could later divorce Mary saving his reputation within his family and the village community. Joseph became so distraught with his decision that he decided to lie down where he fell asleep.

According to Mathew 1: 18-25, While Joseph slept, he was visited by an Angel of God who appeared to him in a dream. The angel said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home". It was then verified through this angel of how Mary conceived. The angel goes further and informs Joseph the child will be a son and is to be called Jesus. The angel also told Joseph that it will be Jesus who will save his people from their sins.

We all know what dreams can be like. When we wake, we wonder if what we experienced was real at all. Joseph had to trust that what he was told was real, and that he should not fear, for God had given him direction. Often is the case those things of spiritual nature must be discerned carefully, and we must walk in faith and not by human desire.

So, let me ask, if **YOU** knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that God Himself was asking you to do something, would **YOU** do it, no matter what the possible consequences were?

Paul told the Corinthians that he "Walked by Faith."

...for we walk by faith, not by sight. ([2 Corinthians 5:7](#))

He also told them...

...we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. ([2 Corinthians 4:18](#))

So How Do We Walk in Faith?

How do we live this life keeping our eyes on spiritual realities? Keeping our eyes on God? Like Joseph, who are we going to listen to?

Who are we going to believe? How are we going to walk? Will we walk by faith, trusting God's word? Or will we trust in our own thoughts? Will we walk by faith in God's promises or faith in Satan's promises?

Paul said he walked by faith not by sight. He meant that he kept his spiritual eyes **NOT** on “the things that are seen” but on “the things that are unseen.” Spiritual realities, Spiritual truths.

In our goal-oriented society, it's easy to forget that walking in Christ is a process. While on earth, we never "arrive" we are slowly transformed along the way. As we trust the Lord, our hearts will overflow with gratitude for all His blessings and the stability He offers in every circumstance.

[Psalm 1](#): gives us a picture of what it means to walk by faith:

“Blessed is the man who walks NOT in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; BUT his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers”.

As we become established in our faith we begin to understand more about the Lord and how He operates, our trust in Him increases, and we experience stability even in the winds of adversity.

Joseph and Mary are probably the **Best Examples** in Scripture of people who fully submitted to the will of God. The courage they showed, in the face of public pressure, is something we can all learn from. **BOTH** had to overcome fears of ridicule, whispers, and likely, hurtful gossip. But they did not have to accomplish their important tasks alone. **GOD** was with them every step of the way.

In Closing;

Let us remember the angel, unlike the one who came to Mary, let us remember the one who appeared in a dream. A dream not inspired by wishful thinking but that of a message from God. **YES**, Joseph doubted the dream at first, but a growing assurance swept over him and trust solidified within his soul. The issue was settled, and it mattered not what wagging tongues would say, Because Joseph believed! So, as Joseph arose from his sleep he did as the Angel of the Lord commanded him and took Mary as his wife.

In the days to come, through our faith and trust, let us travel with Mary and Joseph, from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea the city of David called Bethlehem, so we can experience the long-awaited Miracle Birth of the Messiah.

Amen